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# **COMPLETE WRITING FOR PROFIT**



# COMPLETE WRITING FOR PROFIT

COMPRISING

*"Short Story Writing for Profit,"*  
*"Journalism for Profit,"*  
*"The Commercial Side of Literature,"*  
*"How to Write Serial Fiction,"*  
*"The Magazine Story."*

By  
MICHAEL JOSEPH

5th THOUSAND

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## Foreword

THIS omnibus volume contains the full text of five books: *Short Story Writing for Profit*, *Journalism for Profit*, *The Commercial Side of Literature*, *How to Write Serial Fiction* and *The Magazine Story*.

The first three were originally published in 1923, 1924 and 1925 respectively. The many changes which have taken place in the literary market in the intervening years have made it necessary for me to revise and bring these books up to date. Several chapters have been practically rewritten in the light of changed conditions.

I am much indebted to Mr. Stanley Unwin for his invaluable help in the revision of *The Commercial Side of Literature*, and to the editors and publishers who have contributed statements of their requirements to *Short Story Writing for Profit* and *The Commercial Side of Literature*.

These books of mine do not pretend to teach anyone how to write. Every writer must work out his own salvation. But it is my hope that the beginner who reads them intelligently will be able to avoid some, at least, of the stumbling-blocks which lie in his path, and that the experienced writer may find something of interest in these pages.

MICHAEL JOSEPH.



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**SHORT STORY WRITING  
FOR PROFIT**



## FOREWORD

To talk shop is a justifiable and lovable trait in human nature.

I have often noticed that when authors break loose, that is to say when they escape from their colleagues, and flash their personalities at dinner parties and tea-fights, they invariably talk about Smollett and Fielding, Freud and Froissart, and art, and art, and ART. But when they are together, with no visitors present, they talk about contracts and agents, and the best way to squeeze a bit more out of editors and publishers. All of which is very nice and as it should be.

It is pleasant, therefore, to be associated with a book that is frankly designed to appeal to the young literary aspirant about to open his shop. It is an exciting moment. What goods shall I sell? How shall I dress the window? Shall I keep a cash register or a clerk? What is the best way to get customers?

It is specially pleasant to discuss the questions affecting the short story shop, because the art of writing short stories is probably the only art in which the demand is far greater than the supply. This does not mean that editors do not have sufficient stories submitted to them. They are deluged. But unfortunately barely one-tenth of that deluge is in any way worth serious consideration. I suspect that Michael Joseph's motive in writing this admirable and helpful book is to raise the percentage from ten to say twenty-five per cent. It can be done, and may serve a very useful purpose. Mr. Joseph has had a wide experience and a very special insight into both the artistic and commercial aspect of the short story. He has made a careful study of authors, of plots, themes and construction, and editors' whimsies. He has put the working mind of the short story writer in a crucible, and has set down the record of his analysis for the benefit of all who may desire to have it. Beyond this, however, I am quite sure

that he is not sufficiently sanguine for a moment to imagine that the study and close application to the tenets laid down in his book are going to produce a great story writer, because the trouble is that when the professors and the schoolmen have analysed a proposition to shreds, and have mutually agreed about the exact interpretation of a phrase, and when the last "t" has been crossed, and the last "i" dotted, and we all think it is finished and go home to tea, some gink comes along and does everything exactly opposite to what has been taught, and yet he gets away with the goods. (I make no apologies: this can only be expressed in Americanese.) And yet this does not follow that the professors and the schoolmen are wrong. The difficulty is to strike the happy application of acquired experience to one's own peculiar twists of personality.

In England we hear some, but not very much, talk about style in literature. Style is only taken seriously as affecting clothes and cricket—particularly cricket. Style in cricket is almost an English sacrosanct tradition, and yet one day someone like G. L. Jessop comes along, plays with a crooked bat, crouches, stands in front of his wicket, and knocks up a century against the Australians at Lord's in a Test match. Even then it does not follow that the stylists are wrong. Jessop applied what he had learnt to the demands of his individual genius. The traditional style may still be sounder as a means of training the young.

And so it must be with the writing of short stories. They are not written out of the blue, and Michael Joseph has some stimulating and suggestive things to say with regard to the origin of ideas and how they may be worked.

Up to a certain point everything may be taught. A gifted pianoforte professor can teach a pupil not only to play correctly, to phrase correctly, but even to produce a *good quality of tone*. And there the matter ends. If the pupil has genius he will go further. If he has not, he will stop where the professor leaves him.

I am quite convinced that up to this point a pupil of any intelligence can be taught to write a short story. I once heard an eminent surgeon say: "I cannot think how anyone can write a story. It's a perfect nightmare to me. I shouldn't know even how to *begin*." I italicise "begin," because that is rather the whole point. You certainly have to begin. But if you analyse

the mental processes that go to the making of a short story you quickly realise that you have to finish before you begin. This is a point that Mr. Joseph makes quite clear. I shouldn't know how to begin an operation for appendicitis, but my good surgeon rather overlooks the fact that he has finished his operation for appendicitis (mentally) before he has begun it. This is a point which cannot be stressed too much—that a short story must be finished before it is begun. In other words that you must think it all out clearly and in detail before you begin to write. In a novel it is not so necessary, because you may wander off and enjoy yourself and come back ; but in the short story you have to use the utmost economy and eliminate all superfluous matter. I am sure that the informative side of Mr. Joseph's book regarding the commercial handling of short stories will be very welcome to younger writers who have little experience. The conditions which govern the professional career of the author have changed astoundingly during the last decade. Let us consider the two cases of Charles Dickens and H. G. Wells. Please understand that I am making no artistic comparisons. I am merely regarding them as two highly successful literary shopkeepers in their respective day. In Dickens' time he had his novels published in book form and some of them were serialised, and there from a business point of view the matter ended. But to be as successful as H. G. Wells must be a perfect nightmare. When he writes a novel he has to consider not only the disposal of the English book rights and the American book rights, but the English serial rights, and the American serial rights, and the translation rights in a dozen or more foreign countries. He has also to consider the film rights, and whether the novel would be adaptable as a play. And it looks as though quite soon we shall have some further complications with broadcasting or wireless rights. It sounds enormously lucrative, but on the other hand he has to pay American income tax, English income tax, and supertax, and then either a literary agent or a highly competent secretary. A friend of mine who wrote two best-sellers recently told me that he gets just eight shillings in the pound on what he earns ! In some ways Dickens was better off, especially when we consider that a pound in his day went about as far as ten now.

But certainly at the present day the literary shop is more exciting. Every day brings new developments, new customers.



new disappointments, and new hopes. Anyone who desires to live a comfortable life, with an assured income, and no worries, is advised not to keep a shop—not even a literary shop. But for him or her who is prepared to take the rough with the smooth, and to enjoy risks, and to endure discouragements, it is not a bad old shop. There are days when the weather is dull and overcast, and customers few and far between, and surly in their demeanour. You feel inclined to put up the shutters, and run away and leave it, and never come back. But wait awhile. There dawns a day when the sun comes out, and you suddenly think how attractive your goods look in the window, and customers are jolly and generous. They pat you on the back, and even pay for things in advance, and you are awfully pleased with yourself. You forget about the dull days. You even persuade yourself—quite unreasonably—that the dull days cannot return, because you are living then, and sunshine is a more vital thing than mist.

STACY AUMONIER.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS little book is meant to appeal to those who feel the need of a practical guide to short story writing.

The majority of the authors quoted have been chosen as good working models for the writer who is anxious to produce a saleable story ; and on that account it has been necessary to omit reference to writers such as Tchekhov, Henry James, Katherine Mansfield, Walter de la Mare, Aldous Huxley, May Sinclair, Maurice Baring, Geoffrey Moss, A. E. Coppard, Gerald Bullett, Ernest Hemingway, Liam O'Flaherty, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bibesco, although their work has an important influence on the development of the modern short story.

In an endeavour to help the beginner I have tried to make clear certain general principles of short story writing in a simple, even elementary way, realising, as I hope all young writers will realise, that the real art of story writing can never be taught. Individuality of thought and expression cannot be acquired by learning. But I do feel that at least in a negative way much can be done to remove the more obvious blemishes of amateur efforts. Even if this book serves only the purpose of stimulating interest in the work of certain modern writers of the short story it may perhaps be regarded as a useful stepping-stone.

I claim no special qualifications for a book on the short story except some knowledge of magazine editors' requirements and practical experience of what the amateur really does require in the way of instruction and advice.

My cordial thanks are due to Mr. H. Hessel Tiltman, of the Amalgamated Press, for his valuable advice and criticism.

MICHAEL JOSEPH.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE MAGAZINE SHORT STORY

THE short story used to be described as the Cinderella of English literature. Fashions in fiction come and go, and there are signs that the prejudice against the short story (in book form, at any rate) is fast dwindling away. As a literary form the English short story (except for a brief period in the 'nineties) has never really flourished in the past. Perhaps, as Alec Waugh has said :

"for some not altogether inexplicable reason, it seems to be generally alien to the English literary temperament. . . . For the very qualities which constitute the essence of the short story --restraint, austerity, selection, the prevailing and controlling moral idea—for these the typically impetuous and fecund English temperament has neither the time nor the disposition. The short story is an essay in discipline and interpretation, in which everything depends upon construction, the delicate choice and arrangement of effects, the gradual development and revelation of the idea—in short, upon artistry and soul. And it is a plain fact that the average English novelist cannot take his art seriously enough to master the methods of elimination and production essential to the writing of a satisfactory short story."

Yet when Kipling astonished everybody in the " 'eighties " with a succession of brilliant short stories, he set a literary fashion which for the next decade produced a large and flourishing crop of short stories. The boom in the " 'nineties " resulted in a surfeit.

"Scarcely an author of any repute or no repute," says Rebecca West, "but wrote and published short stories. The better periodicals of the period, such as *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, as well as the worst, were full of them."

Fortunately, not all of these were collected and published in book form, or the short story might have received a blow from which it would have been slow to recover. The pendulum of public taste then began to swing in the opposite direction, and during the past twenty years publishers have generally fought very shy of the volume of collected short stories.

To-day, however, it is significant that publishers are beginning to look with a more favourable eye on short stories. Is it the old story of supply and demand? Or is it because the present day standard of the short story justifies an offering to the public at 7s. 6d. net a volume? With the demand for volumes of short stories this little book is not concerned. Good stories are worthy of the honour of permanent form. The wide editorial market is the field that engages our attention.

I have never been able to understand the people who affect to despise "magazine stories." When some achieve the dignity of book form, there is always an unkind critic to write disparagingly of "fugitive fiction." The fact remains that there is a flourishing market for readable short stories; the public demand entertaining fiction and are prepared to pay their shillings every month to get it. It is easy enough to say that public taste is not very high from an artistic point of view—but does that matter?

In fiction there are two schools of thought. Henry

James held that the art of fiction was to represent life. On the other hand Alphonse Daudet asserted that its primary object was to entertain. Between these two points of view there is really a wide gulf. The demand for fiction that simply entertains is by far greater than the demand for fiction of the Henry James standard; and it is obviously with the former that a book on short story writing for profit will have to deal. There is no reason to scorn the world of so-called "highbrows," which is, after all, entertainment of a higher standard, appealing to a cultured minority. In any artistic or literary comparison popular fiction is bound to suffer, but, taking a wide view, even the most bitter critic must admit that popular fiction serves a wholesome and altogether worthy purpose. It brings pleasure and comfort into countless thousands of lives. No one need be ashamed of producing fiction that entertains.

Yet the magazine—and the public—do not get the short stories they deserve. Many a story gets sent down to the printers because there is nothing better to put in. The whole of our educational system tends to discourage, if not to destroy, any story-writing instinct. The "English Composition" and "Essays" of our schools and universities are useless preparation. In American universities story-writing is part of the curriculum; in this country it is left to correspondence courses (some of which are excellent in their way) to train the would-be writer of fiction.

The trouble is that the ambitious young writer does not know where to begin. And it says much for the enterprise and imagination of English writers that a respectable number of good short stories appears

in print every month. The number could be considerably increased, and it is hoped that this little book will prove something of a practical help to all who wish to become contributors to the fiction magazines.

The magazine short story is one of the most striking developments of modern journalism. A few years ago it was in the experimental stage, making spasmodic and rather apologetic appearances in the more serious magazines. However distant the origin of the short story (and it claims descent from parables of Biblical days and tales told at Arab campfires) its rapid growth and expansion are an entirely modern development. The fiction magazine which contains from half a dozen to twenty complete stories is now an established institution. A later chapter deals comprehensively with the markets awaiting the writer's work. Our first consideration is a clear understanding of the general aim of the short story.

Sir Walter Besant's definition, which applies to fiction generally, is worth quoting at this point :

"The Art of Fiction requires first of all the power of description, truth and fidelity, observation, selection, clearness of conception and outline, dramatic grouping, directness of purpose, a profound belief on the part of the story-teller in the reality of his story, and beauty of workmanship."

Lest this rather formidable statement discourage the beginner, it is as well to point out that a magazine story may lamentably fail to reach this high standard and yet find its way into print.

What is required for a magazine short story ?

To understand the requirements of short story writing and the rules which govern the production of a

saleable short story a preliminary comparison between the novel and the short story may be illuminating.

A short story is *not* in any respect a condensed novel. The novel is as different from the short story as a canvas oil painting is from a miniature portrait. Each medium demands its own treatment. The confusion between the two forms of expression is probably due to the fact that many successful novelists produce short stories with equal facility (although not always with equal felicity). The reverse process—the story writer turned novelist—is also common enough, but this is frequently due to the sense of confidence acquired and an ambition to work on the broader canvas.

But although established authors use the two forms the beginner must realise that the technique of each is absolutely individual.

The essential difference between the short story and the novel is this: the short story aims at a singleness of impression which the novel rarely can produce. There should be one outstanding “point” in a short story—one central incident, or climax, to which everything else in the story is strictly subordinate. (I exclude the comparatively rare short story of character in which characterisation predominates, and refer to the short story of action, in which the movement of events, or plot, is the chief interest.) Everything in the short story must lead up to just that one point which lands on the target of the reader’s receptive consciousness. The Greeks called it the “catastrophe.”

Take, for instance, O. Henry’s story *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*. (*The Trimmed Lamp*, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd.).



For the last nine years Stuffy Pete, an old tramp, has been met by an old gentleman and taken out to dinner. To-day he has already been treated to an enormous meal by two old ladies. Force of habit brings him to the annual trysting place. The old gentleman arrives, goes through the time-honoured ceremony of invitation, and carries off Stuffy Pete to the restaurant. Stuffy Pete has not the heart to disappoint the old gentleman, and by prodigious effort chokes down a second enormous dinner. When the meal is finished the old gentleman and Stuffy Pete part at the door. When Stuffy Pete is outside he collapses. He is taken to hospital. They are puzzled to know what is the matter with him.

And lo! An hour later an ambulance brought the old gentleman. And they laid him on another bed and spoke of appendicitis, for he looked good for the bill. But pretty soon one of the young doctors met one of the young nurses whose eyes he liked, and stopped to chat with her about the cases. 'That nice old gentleman over there now,' he said, 'you wouldn't think that was a case of almost starvation. Proud old family, I guess. He told me he hadn't eaten a thing for three days.'"

The "point" in the story is, of course, the discovery that the old gentleman was starving. O. Henry excels in the "surprise-ending" short story, and this is a typical O. Henry *dénouement* which concentrates in a few simple words at the end the massed-up irony of the whole story.

This singleness or unity of impression is vital to the success of a short story. Once the impression is delivered the story is all over. That is why the desired effect is nearly always produced in the climax at the end. A good test of the efficacy of the climax is to ask oneself whether it could be worked in earlier in the story. If so, there is something radically wrong with it.

In Andrew Soutar's story, *The Way you look at Things* (*London Magazine*, December, 1921), which is more a

study of character than a plot story, you have a clever word-picture of a man blinded in the war who has returned to his native village embittered and in despair. He meets his old Colonel, who takes him in hand, guides him about the countryside, stimulating his interest in all the things he can no longer see. The Colonel is a wonderful tonic; his cheery optimism reconciles his blind companion to the new order of things and completely changes his outlook. When at last he has a real grip on happiness and contentment of spirit that he thought completely lost to him, and is left in the company of the girl who had cared for him all along in spite of his affliction, he discovers that *the old Colonel, too, is blind.*

Obviously this climax must come in the last few words. It could not be revealed earlier, and anything after it is not only superfluous but fatal.

This essential "point" must be the inspiration of the story; incident and characters can be dovetailed in to assist the general accumulative effect as required; but while the process of selection and rejection goes on in the writer's mind the "point" of the story must be installed on a lofty mental pedestal and never lost sight of.

What is the length of a short story? This is a point on which it is impossible to legislate with finality.

Some popular magazines publish so-called "long complete novels"; in reality novelettes, ranging in length from 12,000 to 30,000 words. Where, then, does the short story end and the novel begin? The average full-length novel contains about 80,000 words. These novelettes of 20,000 or 30,000 words are, as a rule, condensed novels—not long short stories. The average magazine short story is from 2,500 to 8,000

words long. From the editor's point of view 3,000 to 4,000 words is a convenient length. The difference between the short story and the novel is, as a matter of fact, a difference of kind, not of length.

The mechanism of the short story is much simpler than that of the novel. There is no room for sub-plots, irrelevant characters or episodes, no scope for detail that does not bear directly on the single, main issue of the story. Every sentence must be examined, consciously or unconsciously, to see whether it is necessary to the story's development. Inexperienced writers have a curious reluctance to delete anything once it is written, particularly if some turn of phrase happens to please them. This is a bad habit which must be ruthlessly eradicated. The test to apply to any word, sentence, or paragraph is: "Is this essential to the story as a whole? How does this help the unfolding of the narrative? What is its definite purpose?" In any instance where it appears that dispensing with the passage in question will not materially affect the story, then is the time to apply the sub-editor's traditional maxim: "When in doubt, have it out!"

Before going on to deal in detail with important features of short story writing, such as plot, dialogue, characterisation, style, and so on, I propose to refer briefly to an aspect of fiction of which the importance is not fully realised. It is a general principle of all fiction. Practised writers observe it unconsciously, but the amateur does not always realise its great importance. The illusion of *reality* is the foundation of successful fiction.

To understand the significance of this "illusion"

think for a moment of the mental process you undergo when you begin to read a story. You unconsciously prepare yourself for immersion in another world. (Herein, in fact, lies the secret of the great attraction of fiction and drama for humanity.) This preparation is caused by an elemental desire to enjoy and appreciate the fictitious story to be unfolded before you. Vicariously you enter into the story, usually as a protagonist. It is because the vast majority of readers—especially women—subconsciously identify themselves with the leading character, usually the heroine, of a story that tales of triumph over adversity, of love conquering all, of ambitions realised and enemies thwarted, are so widely popular. In this way fiction—and a parallel instance, the drama—represents an escape from the often harsh realities of life. The roseate world of fiction is a refuge for the majority of us who try in this subconscious way to forget the disappointments and delusions of real life. Perhaps this explains the popularity of stories with happy endings.

To satisfy the craving of your readers, to induce them to forget their real existence and enter into the special little world created by your story, you must at all costs preserve the illusion. So-called realism in fiction is not really realism at all. It is a special brand of realism—for use in fiction only. Stories “just like real life” are nothing of the kind. Life is dull and monotonous; a faithful picture of real life would be the same. Think what it would mean to reproduce in writing the story of a man’s life for a day only! All the detail, the absolutely irrelevant happenings, the appallingly uninteresting routine of everyone’s daily life presented in detailed outline! Only a genius could do it.

Ordinary thoughts or conversation, for instance, cannot be transferred straight from real life to print. It would read like gibberish. The normal conversation of real life, if reproduced faithfully in print, would not strike the reader as normal. In the same way description, narrative, the whole process of telling a story must be subjected to a kind of refining process.

All art is a continuous process of selection and adjustment. In fiction the details of the picture are not painted in but left to the imagination of the reader. It is important to realise that the reader is willing to co-operate with the writer by bringing his imagination to bear on the story and filling in the inevitable gaps.

The author, then, starts with this advantage, that the reader is ready to meet him half-way, so to speak. The reader says, in effect : " I am willing, even anxious, to believe in the existence of your characters and the happenings of your story ; only by this means shall I be able to derive enjoyment from it."

This places an important obligation on the writer. If through bad judgment or clumsy craftsmanship he strikes a false note the reader cannot be expected to go on believing in the story. The illusion suffers to such an extent that the reader loses patience and, ceasing to enjoy the story, puts it down. It must be remembered that the reader will usually accept the existence of the most wildly improbable facts and people if necessary to the story and provided they are presented with sufficient skill. H. de Vere Stacpoole's novel *The Man Who Lost Himself* and H. G. Wells's famous romances contain the most incredible plots and incidents, but have given entertainment to thousands of readers. For the sake

of enjoying a story the reader will accept any hypothesis, however fantastic.

The power of suggestion in fiction is of supreme importance. Take the description of the Wellsian "Time Machine" in the romance of that title :

The thing the Time Traveller held in his hand was a glittering metallic framework scarcely larger than a small clock and very delicately made. There was ivory in it, and some transparent crystalline substance . . .

"This little affair," said the Time Traveller, resting his elbows on the table, and pressing his hands together above the apparatus, "is only a model. It is my plan for a machine to travel through time. You will notice that it looks singularly askew and that there is an odd twinkling appearance about this bar, as though it were in some way unreal." He pointed to the part with his finger. "Also, here is one little white lever, and here is another."

The medical man got up out of his chair and peered into the thing. "It's beautifully made" he said.

In the laboratory we beheld a larger edition of the little mechanism which we had seen vanish from before our eyes. Parts were of nickel, parts of ivory, parts had certainly been filed or sawn out of rock crystal. The thing was generally complete but the twisted crystalline bars lay unfinished upon the bench beside some sheets of drawings, and I took one up for a better look at it. Quartz it seemed to be.

That is all, but it is enough.

Such an insinuating method is infinitely more effective than any amount of detailed description. In fact the latter would probably confuse the reader, who is not so much anxious to visualise the machine as to accept

the hypothesis of its invention and manufacture and get on with the story.

Take Gilbert Frankau's description of a storm at sea :

He saw the rails dip—saw water rise up over them, a solid wall of it, thick turquoise glass, white-spotted as if by a shower of stones ; saw it stand straight up, smooth opaque window between deck and deck ; stand quite still. This was death ? . . . The blue wall tottered, fell back into the yellowy slather of sea.

This is what the author himself says of it :

“ This particular little picture is a piece of real life as I saw it myself from the deck of a ship during a typhoon. The points to note are that the picture conveys not what actually happened but what appeared to happen. Any sailor will tell you that what actually must have happened was that the ship heeled right over into the water. Seen from the deck, however, it looked as though water came over the ship ‘ like a blue wall. ’ Nor did the blue wall really ‘ fall back. ’ What happened was that the ship recovered herself and stood on a more or less even keel. All the same, I feel that, to the average reader sitting safely in an arm-chair at home, the few lines of picturing give a far more realistic impression than would a long description of what actually happened.”

Preserving the illusion, then, is one of the most decisive factors in successful fiction.

We can now go on to deal with what is probably the most vital element in the magazine short story, the Plot.

## CHAPTER II

### PLOT

"IN the popular magazines," says Arnold Bennett, "ingenuity of plot is almost everything."

The plot, or the outline of the actual story, is of supreme importance. Many a magazine story owes its publication almost entirely to an ingenious plot. Without a good plot the average amateur effort is doomed from the outset. There is, of course, a type of story which depends for its effect not so much on plot as on character or atmosphere; and a good study of character, particularly when it is the work of an author with a "big" name, is a common enough feature of our magazines. For the purpose of this chapter it is, however, sufficient to consider only the straightforward action story.

Originality of plot is an ideal not always realised in practice. The old saying, that there is nothing new under the sun, applies forcefully to fiction. In the strict sense of the word originality is practically non-existent. Ingenuity, cleverness, novelty, fertility of invention, yes, but not real originality. Most magazine stories are variations on very ancient themes. There are many easily recognisable types of plot: the eternal triangle (the man and wife and the other man or woman), the mystery plot, the story of the coward who is really a



hero all the time, plots with sacrifice as the central motive, plots with a moral, in which villainy is overthrown and virtue triumphant, the mistaken identity plot, the love story which ends with wedding bells, the "surprise" ending plot, and so on, familiar to every editor. But however hackneyed the theme, freshness of treatment will go a long way towards securing favourable consideration. An old plot treated from a new angle will satisfy most editorial requirements.

What is a plot? Definitions are proverbially dangerous, we know. But certainly a plot may be described as the outline of the story, the bare outline stripped of all description, characterisation and dialogue. The plot should not be confused with what is often called the "theme." The central idea, the general inspiration of the story is the theme.

A husband and wife, very hard up, but each anxious to make the other a present on the anniversary of their wedding day, resolve independently to sacrifice a precious private possession. The day comes, and the husband produces the combs he has bought for his wife's beautiful hair by the sale of his beloved fiddle, only to find that his wife has cut off and sold her hair to provide him with a new bow for his violin.

The central idea of this briefly expressed plot is the irony of sacrifice. The spirit of sacrifice permeates the story and thus forms the theme.

But the plot is something different from the theme. Theme is the more general term, plot has to fulfil a number of more or less definite requirements. Usually the theme is the first thing to suggest itself to the writer's mind, the plot deriving naturally from it.

A mere narrative is not a plot. As Edgar Allan Poe said :

" A mere succession of incidents will not constitute a plot. A plot, properly understood, is perfect only inasmuch as we shall find ourselves unable to detach from it or *disarrange* any single incident involved without *destruction* to the mass. This, we say, is the point of perfection—a point never yet attained, but not on that account unattainable. Practically we may consider a plot as of high excellence when no one of its component parts shall be susceptible of *removal* without detriment to the whole."

The essential point of difference between plot and narrative lies in a feature of the former which may be called Complication (in the sense of crisis). In narrative, events are described in a straightforward manner, and usually in their natural sequence ; in a plot the happenings are complicated. This device arouses the interest or curiosity of the reader and maintains it until the final dénouement (untying).

Not all short stories conform to this pattern ; in fact, it cannot be too often emphasised that the art of short story writing admits of few dogmatic rules and regulations. It is an elastic medium of expression, and I am firmly convinced that more can be learned by an intelligent study of successful examples than by any other means. But first of all it is essential to understand the requirements of a good short story plot.

With this in view I recommend all young writers (by this I mean, of course, inexperienced writers) to start a Plot Book. This should be divided into two sections, containing in the first, analysis summaries of good short stories, and in the second, original plot summaries and outlines for personal use.

Analysing and summarising plots is a most helpful literary exercise. Aim at putting on record in tabloid form any plot which strikes you as being exceptionally good. Plots of stories by such successful authors as O. Henry, W. W. Jacobs, Leonard Merrick, Stacy Aumonier, Gilbert Frankau, Arthur Morrison, Elinor Mordaunt, should be condensed into about 250-300 words and the brief outlines, which may be jotted down in the form of notes if desired, committed to the Plot Book. Any current magazine story with a striking plot may be similarly dealt with. To give a practical instance of what I mean, your Plot Book might contain something on these lines:

*Homeward Bound*, by Perceval Gibbon.

/ Dan Godwin, who has made good in Africa, is on the point of sailing for home. His wife, Incarnacion, a beautiful primitive-natured girl, reluctantly hands him his coat and pocket-book, afraid that he may gamble with the money which the next morning is to pay for their passage. On his way to Mulligan's saloon Dan is sandbagged and robbed. Frantic, he enlists the help of a friend and embarks on a wild search for the man with an odd rubber-soled shoe whose footprint is his sole clue. At last after weary search they strike the man's trail in the sand, and corner him in his ramshackle house. They find the pocket-book empty. The thief swears there was only twenty milreis in it. To make him reveal where the £200 is hidden Dan threatens him with torture. The terrified wretch sticks to his story and Dan, infuriated at the thought of disappointing his beloved Incarnacion, tortures him—to death. He goes home, inert with misery. Incarnacion greets him, as a child rather frightened of being scolded. She produces two second-class passages, Beira to London, and then the rest of the money. Because he had assured her he would not play cards, she had taken out the money, leaving him only twenty milreis for drinks. "Only twenty milreis!"

After a dozen or more stories have been thus condensed and recorded in the Plot Book, the requirements of a successful plot will gradually become apparent. It is both unnecessary and inadvisable to try and formulate any definite rules governing plot ideas. It is fairly safe to assert that fixed rules and definitions have seldom produced or assisted in the production of good plot ideas. Cut-and-dried formulæ are useless. Generally speaking, a good plot should be original, understandable, and convincing.

As a reader you realise the effect of a short story when you have finished it ; you know whether you have enjoyed it or not, i.e., whether so far as you are concerned the story succeeds or fails. If a story strikes you as a good one it is an excellent plan to put into writing at once a paragraph or two to record the impression the story makes on you. From this the plot summary develops naturally. By this means you will be working backwards to the point from which the writer started. This analysis of other people's work will help you to gain further understanding of the requirements of the process and is invaluable.

Gradually a study of good short stories will enable you to realise all you want to know about plots. No great degree of intelligence is necessary to pick out and write down in your own words the plot of a story you have just read. At this point an indication of writers to study will probably be useful. First and foremost there is :

### O. HENRY (William Sidney Porter).

The plots of this master-craftsman in the art of short story writing are an admirable model. Crisp, distinctive

and interest-compelling all the time, his plots should be carefully studied and analysed by all who are anxious to produce good stories. It is difficult to discriminate where the standard is so high, but the following stories are specially recommended for the purpose of plot study :\*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Hearts and Crosses</i>              | <i>The Man Higher Up</i>                    |
| <i>The Ransom of Mack</i>              | <i>The Cop and the Anthem</i>               |
| <i>The Handbook of Hymen</i>           | <i>"Next to Reading Matter"</i>             |
| <i>The Reformation of Calliope</i>     | <i>A Double-Dyed Deceiver</i>               |
| <i>The Pimiento Pancakes</i>           | <i>A Retrieved Reformation</i>              |
| <i>The Passing of Black Eagle</i>      | <i>Friends in San Rosario</i>               |
| <i>A Madison Square Arabian Night</i>  | <i>Proof of the Pudding</i>                 |
| <i>The Count and the Wedding Guest</i> | <i>The Love Philtre of Ikey Schoenstein</i> |
| <i>The Badge of Policeman O'Roon</i>   | <i>Jimmy Hayes and Muriel</i>               |
|  | <i>The Ethics of Pig</i>                    |
|  | <i>Jeff Peters as a Personal Magnet</i>     |

#### LEONARD MERRICK.

Guy de Maupassant is in many respects the prototype of Leonard Merrick, who is well known as "the novelists' novelist." Merrick has written some of the best modern short stories. These are well worth reading from every point of view.

\* O. Henry's short stories are collected in a uniform 2s. edition under various titles, published by Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.

The plots of the following stories deserve special study :

|                                       |                                 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>A Very Good Thing for the Girl</i> | <i>The Boom</i>                 |
| <i>Picq Plays the Hero</i>            | <i>The Laurels and the Lady</i> |
| <i>The Bishop's Comedy</i>            | <i>Frankenstein II</i>          |
| <i>The Favourite Plot</i>             | <i>With Intent to Defraud</i>   |
|                                       | <i>A Flat to Spare</i>          |

#### H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

is better known as the author of *The Blue Lagoon* and other successful novels than as a writer of short stories, but his plots are so varied and striking that the student should certainly read :

|                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Was She ?</i>                    | <i>The Mystery of Captain Knott</i> |
| <i>The Story of Gombi</i>           |                                     |
| <i>Did Kressler Kill His Wife ?</i> |                                     |

#### STACY AUMONIER,

whose volumes of collected short stories\* have securely established his reputation as a master of the short story, cannot be said to have relied chiefly upon plot for the artistic

\* *The Love-a-Duck and other stories. Miss Brackgirdle and Others* (Hutchinson.) *Overheard, The Baby Grand, Ups and Downs*: (Heinemann.)

success of his stories, but the student will derive much benefit from a study of his work, notably :

|                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>The Landlord of the Love-</i> | <i>The Golden Windmill</i>    |
| <i>a-Duck</i>                    | <i>The Brown Wallet</i>       |
| <i>Little White Frock</i>        | <i>The Octave of Jealousy</i> |
| <i>The Accident of Crime</i>     | <i>Old Iron</i>               |
| <i>The Great Unimpression-</i>   | <i>A Source of Irritation</i> |
| <i>able</i>                      | <i>Them Others</i>            |

### H. G. WELLS.

His collection of stories *The Country of the Blind* contains some splendid models for the young writer. Nearly all his plots will repay analysis and study. Especially do they indicate how wide is the range of the short story. Admirable plots are to be found in the following stories :

|                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>The Stolen Bacillus</i>  | <i>The Magic Shop</i>          |
| <i>The New Accelerator</i>  | <i>The Obliterated Man</i>     |
| <i>The Door in the Wall</i> | <i>A Slip under the Micro-</i> |
| <i>The Crystal Egg</i>      | <i>scope</i>                   |

Wells is a logical, clear-thinking writer, and his plots are the product of an exceptional imagination. Brilliantly conceived, and developed with uncanny skill, there is a clean-cut, vigorous quality about his short stories which it is impossible to imitate (with apologies to Max Beerbohm), but which is invaluable for purposes of study. His stories strike one as being literary *tours de force*. Few of us can reach the level of a writer like Wells, but

just as playing tennis or bridge with the best players improves one's game, so does the study of the best writers' work enable one to visualise the art of writing properly, even if it only means catching a glimpse of the right kind of work.

Other writers whose plots are always worth examination are :

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Sir Philip Gibbs | ' Sapper '        |
| Roland Pertwee   | Frank Norris      |
| John Galsworthy  | Elinor Mordaunt   |
| May Edginton     | Arthur Morrison   |
| Jack London      | F. Britten Austin |
| Irvin S. Cobb    | Eden Phillpotts   |
| Ring Lardner     | Dornford Yates    |

No young writer should be discouraged through reading the work of celebrated authors. Dissatisfaction with one's own work is a healthy sign and should be expressed in an untiring and continuous effort to discover and remove faults and blemishes. "I shall never be able to write like that," is a despondent cry that comes to the lips of all ambitious writers at some time or other, but there is no need for depression. The standard of magazine fiction, at any rate, is not so high as all that. The satisfaction of seeing one's stories in print is within the reach of most of us.

The reading stage is never done with. Reading is food and drink to the writer, and his reading should cover a wide range. It is absurd to despise magazine fiction. From a practical point of view it is useful to be able to write a magazine story, and grateful and comforting in



these hard times to receive the editor's cheque. Surely it is sound policy to keep in close touch with the markets you intend to approach. Therefore read, and go on reading as much as you can, both first-rate stories and magazine fiction as well.

The next step is finding plots for oneself.

This is not so difficult as is sometimes supposed. Often young writers have said to me despairingly: "I don't get any inspiration. How am I going to find a good plot without inspiration?"

This "inspiration" fallacy is responsible for colossal damage to literary ambition. An old machine-gun maxim is "Success is one per cent. inspiration, ninety-nine per cent. perspiration."

It can be usefully applied to writing.

The most fruitful source of inspiration is probably the newspaper. Under the matter-of-fact surface of police court and county court proceedings the drama of humanity in all its aspects is revealed daily to any observant eye. Newspaper paragraphs often contain the germ of an idea. It is this germ you want. Adapt it, modify it, develop it, chew it over in your mind and your plot presently begins to formulate.

"One gets ideas in all sorts of ways," Elinor Mordaunt once told me. "Reading the papers, particularly the Sunday papers; books of travel; books on insanity or criminology; scientific books: once get bitten with the love of story writing, and it crops up in everything."

You read perhaps of a railway strike with its consequent hold-up of vital foodstuffs, milk and so on. Here is your "germ." Your mind goes over the ground and considers the possibilities. The first thing that suggests

itself is perhaps the family of one of the strikers. The wife an invalid, maybe—or a child's chance of life may depend on fresh milk supply. The "point" of your story at once makes itself manifest. The striker triumphs: the child dies. You consider carefully the different aspects of the story. Milk? Rather crude, perhaps. Substitutes could probably be secured somehow. Then why a railway strike? Let's have some other form of strike. The mind, continuing to explore, at last alights on a satisfactory theme. The story begins to unfold itself convincingly in your mind's eye:

A working electrician's child lies dangerously ill. The doctor tells the poor mother that the crisis will come in about three days. The man, thinking it safe to leave them, goes to a labour union meeting. But that night the baby is choking. A friend goes for the doctor. "It's all right," he reassures her. "Just a slight operation and all will be well. Don't worry: the crisis has come a little sooner than I expected, that's all." The doctor moves the single electric light over the bed and begins to sterilise his instruments, the mother standing beside him. He bends over the child and makes an incision, then another. Suddenly—darkness! The light has gone out. "Great God!" he cries, "why did you turn out the light?" "I didn't," comes from the darkness. They turn frantically to the switch—it is useless. At last with groping fingers a candle is found. Too late! The baby is dead. A noise floats to their ears from the street below: the tramp of feet, the Marseillaise. The door opens. The husband stands triumphant before them. "Victory!" he cries. "We've won! There's not an electric light burning in all Paris to-night."\*

And all this may spring from a prosaic newspaper report! This is where your Plot Book sees active service. Jot down in it any striking incident or situation

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\* From a story by George Jean Nathan in the *Associated Sunday Magazine*, U.S.A.

that may work up into a good short story. The actual facts may be useless as they stand, but if you set your imagination to work an adjustment of the situation or an adaptation of the incident will just do the trick.

In this way all sorts of fascinating possibilities present themselves. Personal experiences may be pressed into service. Nothing is too small or too insignificant; a milk-can seen on a doorstep in the early morning, a horse struggling under a heavy load, a woman coming out of a lawyer's office, sobbing, a suburban exchange of old clothes for a plant, a borrowed book with a letter left in it—all these seemingly trivial details may ultimately provide the material for a splendid plot. *The Eighth Wonder*, by A. S. M. Hutchinson, probably owes its inspiration to a cigarette picture.

"A scientist once told me," wrote Elinor Mordaunt, "that if it were possible to bring cold to a certain point below freezing, I believe he called it the absolute zero, anything affected by it would absolutely disappear. Shut a man in an iceroom with such a temperature and there would not be so much as a button left to tell the tale. . . . 'What a plot for a murder story!' That was my one thought."

One story frequently suggests another. This is particularly true of film stories. Perhaps the atmosphere of the cinema, where the eyes concentrate on transmitting the story to the brain and the senses are soothed (sometimes) by music, encourages the brain to go exploring for itself. I heartily recommend the cinema as a stimulator of plot ideas.

Searching for plots is a pastime which ultimately becomes an ingrained habit. It is, moreover, an

entertaining mental exercise, and the more you practise the better you become at it. The imagination seems to thrive on its own ingenuity.

It is difficult to avoid the hackneyed plot and still more difficult to advise what to avoid, but as a rough-and-ready rule editors do not like plots based on :

- (1) Mistaken Identity.
- (2) Sacrifice for Love's Sake.
- (3) The eternal triangle plot (two men and one woman or two women and one man).
- (4) The hero who sets out to make a fortune and comes back in the last line to marry the girl who has waited for him, or the poor boy whose industry wins him the hand of his employer's daughter.
- (5) The hero (l) who unwittingly offends his new employer or future father-in-law.

Yet, as I have said, the most hackneyed theme or plot may be used provided the treatment is original. These ancient plots are like diamonds cut with many facets. The whole appearance may be different if a new facet or aspect be presented to the reader. And, of course, the editor's point of view is his readers' point of view. He is paid to interpret what his readers want.

Short stories with a religious or political bias should be carefully avoided. Fiction Editors will never risk the publication of a story which might cause offence to any section of their public—however small. A story with an improper theme is similarly offensive.

The magazine story should not be a vehicle for personal opinions, prejudices, and only rarely for philosophy.

It is often difficult to decide what to work on and what

to reject in one's plot for short stories. Although, as Elinor Mordaunt says, you should "write stories without ceasing if you want to succeed, sparing nothing in the way of trouble, grudging nothing in the way of mental outlay," it is not easy to discriminate between ideas for plots.

What you may think "a fine idea" for a story may peter out in the most disappointing way when you start to work it out in pen and ink. The temptation to begin at once on "a fine idea" is often fatal.

"Most writers of experience," wrote the literary critic of the *Sunday Dispatch*, "especially those engaged in manufacturing short stories that are not utterly ephemeral and conventional, know that there is nothing they must be more wary of than 'the fine idea.' More often than not this attractive and intriguing visitor from the unknown is a double-dyed traitor sent to waste the time and energy of the poor author, to render him bad-tempered, and to lure him like a will-o'-wisp into a literary morass.

"In other words, 'the fine idea' has a fatal habit of proving abortive when it is called upon to produce a fine story. It is discovered to lead either nowhere at all or to some quite unsatisfactory result, very different from the original expectation.

"The trouble is that the misguided author does not find out how he has been fooled till he has spent enormous trouble over something that was doomed from the start to be a failure.

"The notebooks of professional story-tellers are filled with 'fine ideas.' They all get them. The more optimistic sit down to write at once under the spell, and in nine cases out of ten suffer disappointment.

"The knowing ones merely jot 'the fine idea' down in their notebooks and leave it there along with its brethren until its pristine glamour has worn off and its virtues as a literary seedling may be judged with a critical and dispassionate eye. Not infrequently 'the fine idea' never does emerge from the notebook. Once its meretricious smile has worn off, it is seen to be hollow with deceit."

• No better motto exists for the young writer than "make haste slowly." Write at white heat by all means, but if your judgment on any point is the least bit indefinite, it is better to put the plot or the incomplete manuscript or even the finished story on one side for a week or two and then go back to it. You will find that your critical judgment is much keener, and decision will often prove easy enough. The secret of this simple little plan is that you come to your own work as a reader and critic ; not as a creator.

Submitting plots to your friends is a good plan if they have the patience to listen. Not that their verdict will help you much (unless they are specially qualified to judge), for they are bound to be prejudiced one way or the other ; in fact it is hard to say whether the enthusiasm and praise of one's admiring friends are not more damaging than the determined candour of the person who secretly doesn't think "poor Arthur will ever do any good with his stories." No, the benefit you will reap is by talking over your embryonic stories aloud. On the principle that prophets are unhonoured in their own country, it is best to avoid one's own family and to discuss these things with one's friends only. Telling your rough ideas to people helps you to clarify your own vision, to hammer out on the anvil of discussion the actual working-scheme of your story.

Thinking about your plot is almost as good as talking aloud about it. The original inspiration may be distinct and clean-cut, but, generally speaking, the\*building of the story, the character, the ever-present problem of what to put in and what to leave out—all this is hazy and only dimly visualised. Therefore allow yourself—

or, if you are a slow thinker, force yourself—to think. Consider your characters, the various methods you can employ to unfold the story, the hundred and one details of its structure—let it all soak in carefully before you take up a pen. Unless, of course, you are one of those people who cannot think clearly and logically except with a pen in their hands. Stacy Aumonier took his plots for a walk, literally ; and when the idea was absorbed, digested and the various incidents and characters brought into focus, he wrote the whole story at one sitting. If an idea did not develop naturally, he scrapped it. Elinor Mordaunt, too, is firmly of the opinion that it is hopeless to start tinkering with a short story. If it gets out of hand it must be scrapped, and, after a while, if the plot still seems good enough, rewritten.

I do not suggest that these few ideas are the royal road to success at plot-finding. The ultimate judge of your work sits in an editorial chair daily sifting literary wheat from chaff. So much of the stuff that goes to the making of good short stories cannot be taught—individuality of style, humour, sympathy, that “unconscious sense of judgment,” a feeling for effect, a sense of balance or proportion, imagination, good taste, and just that human touch which arouses and grips interest, lifting the story out of the ruck of piled MSS.—none of these things can be acquired by learning. Not that every magazine story has all or any of these qualities ; and while I, in common with all admirers of the short story as a literary form, should like to see the standard raised all round, and, needless to say, prefer a good story to a bad one, I must still insist on the possibilities awaiting the ordinary writer in the fiction market of to-day.

And, without doubt, plot is the most important feature of the present-day short story, and in my opinion the feature of amateur efforts which is most susceptible of improvement. Therefore concentrate on getting a good plot. Remember that a story by an unknown writer, however well written and constructed, has very small hope of success if the plot is feeble ; and, on the other hand, a good plot goes a very long way and brings a gleam of satisfaction into the editor's eye.

Hard work is the real secret of success. Reading for profit as well as pleasure, and real hard work. Writing and writing : sometimes writing for hours only to destroy and begin afresh ; and unfailing patience and perseverance.

Ideas for plots do not descend like a bolt out of the blue. The writer who sits biting his penholder, waiting for inspiration, gets " left " in the race. Plots are everywhere around us ; it is up to us to go out and look for them and drag them in by their tails.



## CHAPTER III

### THE COMPOSITION OF THE SHORT STORY

#### (1) THE OPENING

THE two most common ways of telling a short story are

- (1) Third person narrative.
- (2) First person singular narrative.

Various other forms exist. The "diary" form (e.g., *The Horla*, by Guy de Maupassant), the "single-letter" form (e.g., *In the Year of Our Lord*, 1918, by Leonard Merrick),\* the correspondence form (e.g., *A Man of Letters*, by Stacy Aumonier),† and the all-dialogue form, which is practically equivalent to the one-act play.

#### THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE.

This is the most popular form, and one generally adapted to the needs of the short story. It gives the writer the "omniscience" which enables him to relate the speech and thoughts of all the characters and to be in as many places at once as is necessary. The writer usually keeps entirely in the background. The story is told in a straightforward manner and the author

\* In *To Tell you the Truth*. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

† *Miss Bracegirdle and Others*. (Hutchinson.)

refrains from butting in with any comments of his own. This principle is, however, frequently violated with impunity by well known authors. Thackeray frequently steps into his pages to point a moral. O. Henry inserts many a slice of personal philosophy to interrupt the action of the story; but these are the privileges of success, and the beginner will be well advised to keep his story impersonal.

### FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

This method of telling a story has one outstanding advantage. The *personal* point of view lends additional conviction to the story, although at the same time it does restrict the useful omniscience already referred to. There is, however, no objection to a combination of both methods. Many a successful story told in the first person takes full advantage of omniscience. But it has to be done very carefully, otherwise the illusion of reality is at once shattered and the story must fail.

The story-teller must not be egotistical or the reader's sympathy will vanish. "The man who writes an autobiography is telling a story against himself." The hero describing his own exploits is thus in a delicate position. Therefore the type of story which most suitably lends itself to this method of narration is that which is told by a subordinate character. For example, take the Sherlock Holmes stories, narrated by his friend Dr. Watson. Watson is an amiable, rather\*stupid person who acts as an excellent foil to the astute Sherlock Holmes. On the other hand, the same author's *Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* are told by the Brigadier himself;

but the story of his adventure had no displeasing flavour of egotism because the boasting is all part of the fun.

Many of Michael Arlen's stories are told in the first person, with the actual narrator of the story a subordinate character whose outlines are just sufficiently shaded in to prevent the reader regarding him as a complete nonentity. Thus *The Man with the Broken Nose*, *The Luck of Captain Fortune*, and *The Ancient Sin*.<sup>\*</sup> A classic instance of this method is Edgar Allan Poe's *The Gold Bug*.

The various other ways of telling short stories are temporarily, at any rate, so much out of fashion that it is not worth while discussing them here. However, let no one be discouraged from attempting a story in diary or letter form. It may so happen that such a method will suit his or her particular style or fit in happily with the general scheme of the story ; but it is just as well to sound this note of warning : editors of to-day do not care for these methods. Undoubtedly the best form for the beginner is third person narrative. There is no suggestion of egotism and there is no restriction in telling the story.

All that can be safely said of the structure of the modern short story is that study will reveal certain fundamental principles. The whole framework is elastic, and any effort which, in the words of Mr. H. G. Wells, is " very bright and moving ; it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or beautiful or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud," is entitled to be considered a short story.

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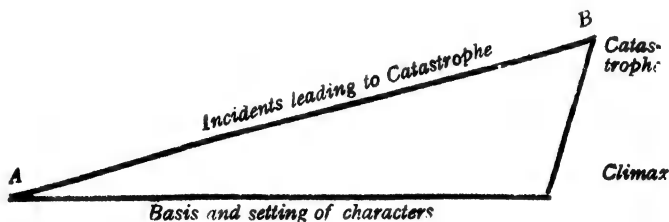
<sup>\*</sup> *These Charming People*, by Michael Arlen. (Collins.)

We are not, however, concerned so much with definitions as with the various types of story which experience has shown to be acceptable to editors.

The majority of short stories published may be roughly dissected as follows :

- (1) Opening or Introduction.
- (2) Body of the Story.
- (3) Catastrophe or Climax, and (sometimes) *Dénouement*.

Elinor Mordaunt's theory of the short story is, roughly, the shape of a triangle : a long base, one long side, and a short drop.



"Catastrophe" is used in the Greek sense and signifies that "point" in the story which is emphasised in the chapter on Plot. The "catastrophe" must make a sharp, distinct impression on the reader, whether of surprise, horror, amusement or any other emotion. From this point the story must march with quickened stride to its imminent end. Sometimes the catastrophe (B) occurs in the very last paragraph, and thus coinciding with the climax (C) ends the story. This point is more fully dealt with in the chapter on Climax.

The construction of short stories is vitally affected by two considerations—time and space. The action of a short story must be an unbroken thread. It is impossible to set a limit to the time covered by the action ; William Caine's story *The Pensioner* \* is only 1,600 words long, yet effectively covers a period of ninety-seven years.

Generally speaking, the rules which govern the one-act play apply to the short story. The action should occupy only a brief period of time without any dislocations such as "Ten years passed by." Similarly restricted space is advisable. The entire action may take place within one room. This is known, of course, as "observing the unities," and is one of the fundamental differences between the short story and the novel.

The interest must be accelerated as the story is gradually unfolded. Therefore the catastrophe or climax represents the summit of the reader's interest, and it is at this point that the desired effect of the story is produced, the snapshot impression flashed at the reader—and then *finish*.

The basis of the story, the setting, atmosphere, characterisation, anything you want the reader to know before the climax is presented, must be worked in beforehand. Not by description but by suggestion. Indirect suggestion is better than direct description. It is true, as one authority points out, that the writer may, in a single sentence, supply his characters with emotions and sentiments. Adjectives are common enough. But the most effective description is indirect ; the revelation of character and emotion by means of dialogue and

\* Included in *The Best Short Stories of 1922*. (Jonathan 7s. 6d.)

incident. All this is woven into the fabric of the story, as anyone who analyses good short stories may readily see for himself. Skill in interweaving the basis of the story and the actual plot is craftsmanship, which (except for a few rare cases of genius or "knack") is a matter of laborious study and experiment. But it makes all the difference between good short stories and bad.

Let us, then, roughly divide the short story into three parts, the opening or beginning, the body of the story, and the climax, catastrophe, *dénouement* or end, and consider each fragment in turn.

### THE OPENING OR BEGINNING

This is very important. The first few lines of a story have been well described as "the author's letter of introduction to the reader." It is essential to arouse the reader's interest as quickly as possible. Dull, rambling introductions are uninviting and the jaded reader (or editor) is at once prejudiced unfavourably. There is no room in the modern short story for any preamble. The violinist is obliged to tune his instrument before he can play; the writer is at no such disadvantage.

In addition to arousing interest, the beginning of a story has another important function. It must strike the keynote of the story. A humorous story must be indicated by a humorous opening; the adventure story, love story, mystery story, must all have appropriate beginnings. The reader must be prepared for the nature

of the story. This, for instance is a typical humorous story opening

"Over the expensive life of Henry McAdam Bulpit hovered ever a presence, chilling, whiskered, sinister, cramping it, robbing it of life and joy, oppressive, very nearly crushing—his butler James Crowley." (*Henry Bulpit Breaks Away*—Edgar Jepson, *Pearson's Magazine*.)

The following opening plainly indicates the theme :

"It is an old, old threadworn story that often—or always—a man is trapped by the fate or providence or deity or life he has defied. But never was there so strange a trapping, so deliberate and terrible and unescapable a snare, as that which befell Robert Kinstry. Never was the finesse of God more exquisitely set forth." (*The White Lotus*—H. Bedford Jones, *Blue Book Magazine*.)

In *A Portrait of a Coward*,\* Leonard Merrick strikes the keynote of the story in the very first sentence.

"Every Sunday Mrs. Findon went with her two step-daughters to the cemetery and put flowers on the grave."

Followed eight lines later by :

"and their young stepmother would gaze from the window, wondering whether the pretence of mourning a husband she had not loved was to be her lot for life."

Although it is not essential to strike the keynote of the story in the very first paragraph, it is always advisable to do so as quickly as possible. It is not necessary to emphasise this point, as anyone with an instinct for writing will do it almost unconsciously.

In *To tell you the Truth*. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

The general aim of the writer is to put the reader in the right frame of mind. More particularly, to convey either setting, atmosphere, or information. There are three recognised ways of beginning a story :

- (1) With a descriptive opening or introduction.
- (2) With dialogue.
- (3) By plunging straight into the action.

All three methods should (1) arouse interest ; (2) strike the keynote of the story.

#### (1) WITH AN INTRODUCTION OR DESCRIPTIVE OPENING

The old-fashioned introduction which consisted of one or more paragraphs of moralising or philosophy, having only an indirect bearing on the story itself, is no longer in favour. One must be prepared, however, for reaction, and as this method may return to favour at some future time, it may be as well to quote one or two examples :

"The mental features discoursed of as the analytical are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment. As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles." (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.—Edgar Allan Poe.)

(This introduction continues on these lines for no less than 1,100 words, and ends :



"The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of commentary upon the propositions just advanced.")

"We can be but partially acquainted ever with the events which actually influence our course through life, and our final destiny. There are innumerable other events—if such they may be called—which come close upon us, yet pass away without actual results, or even betraying their near approach, by the reflection of any light or shadow across our minds. Could we know all the vicissitudes of our fortunes, life would be too full of hope and fear, exultation or disappointment, to afford us a single hour of true serenity. This idea may be illustrated by a page from the secret history of David Swan." (*David Swan*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne.)

"It is a terribly easy thing to fall into—imperceptibly to glide into—evil-doing, and once embarked on the slippery descent, there is no telling how low one may descend. This, the moral of the story of Mr. Bostock, is, in accordance with modern practice, placed at the beginning of the story instead of at the end, which our grandfathers considered the proper place. Nowadays we get the moral over and out of the way as soon as possible and find it good riddance." (*Mr. Bostock's Backsliding*, by Arthur Morrison.)

It is over twenty years since Arthur Morrison wrote the above, and to-day it would be true to say we have dispensed with the moral altogether. It may still be implicit in the story, but any statement of it is unfashionable.

The introduction *per se*, then, although occasionally used by well-known writers, is best avoided by the beginner to-day, except in a form so brief and elliptical that it becomes a mere literary "pause for breath" before launching into the story proper. As, for example :

"A closed door suggests privacy, secrecy, mystery, even ; and a door flung widely open may stand for hospitality, and

frequently does. But a door that's just a little bit ajar seems to signify watchfulness from within.

"The latter was true in the case in hand. Behind a door which was open for a space of some three or four inches, a very nice-looking young man was standing," etc. (*Thank God for Modern Hotels*, by Irvin S. Cobb.)

The "story within a story" obviously requires an introduction. This popular form is rather like a nut which has to be cracked before it can be eaten, and enables the reader to settle down comfortably for the real yarn. It is also a useful device to convey the setting and general circumstances which lead up to the story.

The descriptive opening is probably the most popular method of beginning a short story. It must not be dull, stodgy, conventional, nor commonplace, nor put the reader to any mental effort to get a grip of the story. It must be terse and crisp and stimulate the reader's interest at once. The descriptive opening may be used to convey character, setting or atmosphere, information, or a combination of all three.

#### (a) TO CONVEY CHARACTER :

"Miss Winifred Goode sat in her garden in the shade of a clipped yew, an unopened novel on her lap, and looked at the gabled front of the Tudor house that was hers and had been her family's for many generations. In that house, Dun's Hall, in that room beneath the southermost gable, she had been born. From that house, save for casual absences rarely exceeding a month in duration, she had never stirred. All the drama, such as it was, of her life had been played in that house, in that garden. Up and down the parapeted stone terrace walked the ghosts of all those who had been dear to her—her father, a vague but cherished memory, her mother, dead three years since, to whose invalid and somewhat selfish needs she had devoted all her full young womanhood." (*The Conqueror*--William J. Locke.)

"Mrs. Poulteney-Reelbrow is the kind of woman who drips with refinement. Everything else has been squeezed out of her. Even her hair, which once was red, has been dried to a rusty grey. Her narrow face is pinched and bloodless; the lines of her figure blurred by shapeless and colourless materials, as though she resented any suggestion of organic functioning, as though blood itself were not quite 'nice.'" (*Mrs. Beelbrow's Lions*—Stacy Aumonier.)

### (b) TO CONVEY SETTING :

"Just past the Trafalgar Hotel, which overhangs the river at East Greenwich, there runs an alley with a double row of small houses facing each other eye to eye. The backs of those on the south side are hemmed in by a huddle of miscellaneous buildings—that might have been shot out of a rubbish tip, save for the two at the far end, from the upper windows of which one may catch a glimpse of the serene, flower-bordered walks and mulberry trees of Trinity Hospital gardens.

"But the houses on the river side are pierced by alleys and arches, revealing a strip, or half lemon, of silvery light, crossed and recrossed by sienna-tinted sails, fractions of great steamers, trailing pennants of smoke, or the whole body of a Tilbury lighterage tug with its striped yellow and red funnel; each picture set deep in a framework of blackened buildings.

"It was in the upper room of one of these riverside houses, built of black, overlapping timber, that Dor lived..." (*The Goldfish*—Elinor Mordaunt.)

"At six o'clock the back streets were dark and black; but once in the Bethnal Green Road, blots and flares of gas and naphtha shook and flickered till every slimy cobble in the cartway was silver tipped." (*Three Rounds*, by Arthur Morrison, from *Tales of Mean Streets*.)

### (c) TO CONVEY ATMOSPHERE (AND THEME) :

"The laboratory was empty, and in darkness save for the night shimmer which peered down through its slanted skylights.

A place of life and death, this laboratory. A haunted place. The ghosts of a thousand nameless explorers into the dim territories of science seemed hovering about the phosphorescent marble of that long desk-like shelf over which John Cartwright would bend, hour after hour, among his pallid retorts, and his stacked test-tubes and the Bunsen burners his steady hand kindled to blue cones of steady flame." (*Marriner's Law*, by Gilbert Frankau.)

(d) TO CONVEY ATMOSPHERE (AND SETTING) :

"The still air of the tropic night hung listless and languorous. A host of nameless insects wheeled in a dusty halo around the blackened glass of the oil lamp that swung from a beam and beat against the wooden walls. Beyond the verandah-rail the blackness stretched like a cloth of jet in which no star glimmered. In that eerie silence, Donald Bowen sensed the electricity with which the atmosphere was charged." (*The Opal Ring*, by Edmund Snell.)

(e) TO CONVEY INFORMATION :

This, generally speaking, is a poor opening, and a sign of weakness. In nine cases out of ten it is necessary to place before the reader certain facts which do not come into the categories of setting or character. Whenever possible, these facts should be deftly inserted into the story while it is in motion. A much more realistic effect is obtained by conveying information *incidentally*. It is very rarely that this becomes impossible, and that it is found necessary to prelude the story with a paragraph of detail. When it cannot be avoided, the facts must be made *interesting*.

An opening paragraph on the lines of the following is the kind of thing to avoid :

"My name is Edward George Eden. I was born at Trentham in Staffordshire, my father being employed in the gardens there. I lost my mother when I was three years old, and my father when I was five, my uncle, George Eden, then adopting me as his own son. He was a single man, self-educated and well-known in Birmingham as an enterprising journalist; he educated me generously, fired my ambition to succeed in the world, and at his death, which happened four years ago, left me his entire fortune, a matter of about five hundred pounds after all outgoing charges were paid. I was then eighteen."

But if the pill be sugared sufficiently, the reader will swallow it readily enough.

The above paragraph was, as a matter of fact, prefaced by the following:

"I set this story down, not expecting it will be believed, but, if possible, to prepare a way of escape for the next victim. He, perhaps, may profit by my misfortune. My own case, I know, is hopeless, and I am now in some measure prepared to meet my fate."

In justice to Mr. H. G. Wells, who wrote this story (*The Story of the late Mr. Elvesham*),\* I must point out that the bald, unvarnished statement of his second paragraph is a deliberate and clever device to impart an atmosphere of reality to the story.

Unless, then, there is some special reason for presenting the reader with a paragraph of facts, the writer will do better to distribute them throughout the story. There are always plenty of suitable openings to convey information to the reader, without cramming them down his throat.

Character, setting and atmosphere are so often

skilfully dovetailed into the opening passages of a story, that it is practically impossible to separate them.

## (2) DIALOGUE

This is not such a common method of breaking the ice as is generally supposed. Of a total of seventy-two stories published in the following magazines for one month—*Nash's*, *Strand*, *London*, *Royal*, *Pearson's*, *Sovereign* (now defunct) and *Novel*, only eight begin with a conversational opening.

The dialogue opening must be done well, or not at all. Nothing grimaces at the editor so much as a feeble dialogue commencement.

The kind of story that is best served by a dialogue opening is the light, humorous love story. It must be remembered that dialogue is not used for its own sake, but to convey character, setting, or incident. Character, for example, is revealed by the following dialogue opening :

“ ‘ I don't believe all these stories about German atrocities,’ came from the paler of the two youths on my left.” (*Jules Schumacher—Englishman*, by Gilbert Frankau.)

Later chapters deal more fully with the revelation of character by dialogue.

Dialogue may also be used to convey setting and, more frequently, incident. A dialogue opening attracts the eye and, properly exploited, represents “human interest,” thereby fulfilling one of the two chief functions of the opening, *viz.* : arousing the reader's interest.

## (3) BY PLUNGING STRAIGHT INTO THE ACTION

There is a marked tendency among present day editors to favour this method. The story should begin, as one editor has said, on the threshold of the plot, if not in the middle of it. This typical magazine form allows for no preliminary survey of setting or character, and thus imposes on the writer the obligation of weaving deftly into the fabric of the story as it proceeds the various aspects of character or background of which the reader must be made aware.

This method of beginning the story is easily mastered, as will be seen from a glance at the magazines, and it should certainly form part of the young writer's equipment. This is a typical opening :

" Fred Baisley turned quickly into Queen Street, almost ran the last fifty yards of his way, and whistling ' Dixie ' with short-breathed fervour, opened the door of his own shop." (*Antiques for Two*, by Bohun Lynch.)

All these methods of beginning a short story are liable to overlapping. Indeed, if the story requires it, the professional writer will dovetail setting, character, and action into the first paragraph itself. For example :

An obese Chinaman crouched at his window in one of the weather-board houses leaning towards each other across the narrow alley way of Cherry Garden Pier. The dirty blind was half down, but he sat pressed against the wall at the side of it, peering through the crack, well out of sight ; out of mind, too, for no one had a thought of Sing Al Wen being in that upper room of his, sacred to fan-tan and opium, at six o'clock on a hot summer's evening.\*

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\* *Peepers All*, by Elinor Mordaunt.

Note that in this one opening paragraph (1) the action begins.

"A Chinaman crouched at his window, peering through the crack . . . at six o'clock." (2) Character is conveyed (the suggestion of the "obese Chinaman" peeping from behind the blind, with the additional suggestion of deceit—"for no one had a thought," etc.).

(3) The process of painting in the setting or background has also begun in these few lines: "The weather-board houses leaning towards each other across the narrow alleyway of Cherry Garden Pier. The dirty blind . . . the upper room, sacred to fan-tan and opium . . . a hot summer's evening."

This—in a word—is craftsmanship. Only by a careful study of other writers' work may this skill in the manipulation of words and phrases, sentences and paragraphs, be acquired by the beginner. But it is well worth while.

Occasionally the opening of the story is designed simply to catch the reader's eye. This bid for the reader's interest usually takes the form of an unexpected statement, epigram, paradox, a crisp, short sentence, or a fragment of witty dialogue. Many well known writers are fond of this method, and there is no objection to the beginner adopting the device, provided he can handle it skilfully enough.

"Charlie had no true vice in him. All the same, a man may be over-taxed, over-harassed, over-driven, over-pricked and over-starved right up to the edge; and the fascination of the big space below may easily pull him over." (*The Song*, by May Edginton.)

"It was the maddest and most picturesque hotel at which we had ever stopped." (*The Bat and Belfry Inn*, Alan Graham.)



"I am quite aware that in giving you this story just as I was told it, I shall incur the charge of downright and deliberate lying." (*Major Wilbraham*, Hugh Walpole.)

"This is quite a simple story, but it is about a lord." (*The Shameless Behaviour of a Lord*, Michael Arlen.)

"Baldy Woods reached for the bottle, and got it." (*Hearts and Crosses*, O. Henry.)

"He wished he were dead. It was not a phrase, a verbal extravagance; he wished it." (*With Intent to Defraud*, Leonard Merrick.)

"The financier was cracking walnuts when the curate arrived." (*The Favourite Plot*, Leonard Merrick.)

"Mr. Jobson awoke with a Sundayish feeling, probably due to the fact that it was Bank Holiday." (*Fine Feathers*, from *Ship's Company*, by W. W. Jacobs.)

In a series of omplete stories, a similarity of **copening** is a device that helps to give unity to the whole. The well known *Night Watchman* openings of W. W. Jacobs provide a case in point.

How shall I begin my story? is a question that can only be decided by the requirements of the story itself. A study of the methods outlined in this chapter, amplified, as always, by a wide survey of current fiction, and the methods favoured by successful writers, gives the young writer a fairly wide range, and it should not be difficult to come to a decision. The main points to bear in mind are:

The opening must arouse the reader's interest at once;

should serve a definite purpose (convey setting or character or information, or a blend of them); and should, if possible, strike the keynote of the story as a whole.

Above all—don't be conventional.

## CHAPTER III

### THE COMPOSITION OF THE SHORT STORY

#### (2) THE BODY OF THE STORY

A ROUGH division of the short story into three parts—opening, body, and end—has this disadvantage. It may lead the beginner to imagine that short stories split up naturally into these three component parts. Nothing could be further from the truth. A clear line of demarcation very seldom exists ; in fact, so often do all three merge into each other that it is impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. This is true of all the characteristics of the short story : setting, plot, character, incident, emotion—all are so subtly blended into one artistic whole as to be inseparable. You cannot take a short story to pieces as you would a machine.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to examine the materials which go to the making of a story, provided that one always bears in mind that there is no fixed pattern and that there exists an endless variety in composition. When the first short story was written, there were no rules nor traditions to govern its shape or form ; the short story, like any other form of artistic expression, has had to develop and shape itself as it went along. To-day, the young writer may see for himself what

constitutes a short story. Nothing is to be gained by a study of formulæ and definitions; but an intelligent application of the general principles which are so plentifully illustrated in the work of established authors will prove invaluable.

The plot is the skeleton of the story. One of the most difficult problems which faces the young author is that of putting flesh on its bones. The majority of beginners err in the direction of excess. They write too much, and what they write is usually so badly proportioned that the real merit of their plot is obscured. As one critic has said, the story sprawls like a jelly-fish all over the page.

It is not a matter of good writing or bad. Short story writing does not require fine writing; but something infinitely more difficult—selection, discrimination, and very often drastic amputation. Every word must tell, every phase of the story must be sharp and distinct. Charles Lamb once described a character in fiction as a “ratherish” person. The short story is not the place for “ratherish” people. All its characters, emotions, incidents, must stand out in sharp relief. Above all, something must always be happening. The story must “march,” and the pace is a gradually increasing one until the catastrophe or climax. Every paragraph—sometimes nearly every sentence—should carry the story a distinct step forward.

It may reasonably be argued that it is often necessary to convey to the reader a certain amount of information and explanation in addition to the background and setting, “local colour,” etc. This is quite true; but all this should be done as quickly as possible in order to

clear the stage, as it were, for the unfolding of the plot. Long-winded explanations and descriptions are out of place; the process is a much more subtle one. An adjective, the deft insertion of an adjectival clause—all these are put in as the story progresses. With the art that conceals art, the reader is enabled to form a clear mental picture of a scene or a character. A direct statement is nearly always avoided. It is the important short-story principle of indirect suggestion being better than direct description.

To take an elementary illustration from Arthur Morrison's entertaining story, *Mr. Bostock's Backsliding*, in which it is necessary to bring to the notice of the reader the existence of a prison in the neighbourhood, note how the mention of it is skilfully tucked into the early part of the story.

Describing Scarbourn,

the most genteel town on the English coast, where every male visitor positively must change all his clothes at least three times a day, and no lady must be seen to wear anything twice,

the author continues:

No place on earth basks in a more sacred odour of perfect respectability than this blessed spot, with nothing to mar its bliss but the presence of a vulgar convict prison a few miles inland. . . .

It is not necessary to describe everything in detail. As in a clever black and white drawing, where the gaps are adequately filled by the eye, so in fiction the reader's memory, aided by a subconscious association of ideas, completes the picture. You may remember Chaucer's

friar who, before sitting down by the fireside, chased away the cat. You do not require any explanation to understand that the friar had chosen the snuggest corner for himself. To read of a man wiping his forehead with a large red handkerchief is a better way of introducing the red handkerchief than by saying the man had a red handkerchief in his pocket. All these little details—often of great significance—should be worked into the main thread of the story, *viz.* : the action.

The body of the story is the story itself. The opening may actually have begun the story ; if not, it has prepared the way. The reader is (presumably) in the right frame of mind, knows what kind of entertainment is in store for him, and, in order to be entertained, is willing to believe in your scene and your characters.

At this point it may occur to the writer that the outline of the plot is a very different thing from the action of the story. In the plot the sequence of events is naturally determined by cause and effect ; actions and their consequences. In the story the consequences very often have to come first, and the revelation of the actions which produced them has to be delayed till later on in the story ; otherwise the reader will lose all interest.

The detective or mystery story is a good instance of this. A murder, or a crime, is committed. The reader, along with the investigators in the story, is baffled and uncertain of the outcome until perhaps the very end of the story, when, hey presto ! the criminal is unmasked. The *dénouement* then reveals the steps which led up to the discovery of his identity, thus bringing the story to a plausible and satisfying conclusion.

This quality of preserving the reader's interest is simply—suspense.

How is suspense created ?

We have seen that plot differs from straightforward narrative in one important respect—complication. The thread of the story is suddenly twisted. Something happens ; the story takes a new turn or presents an incident which is apparently unforeseen. Curiosity is aroused and the foundation is laid for a crisis.

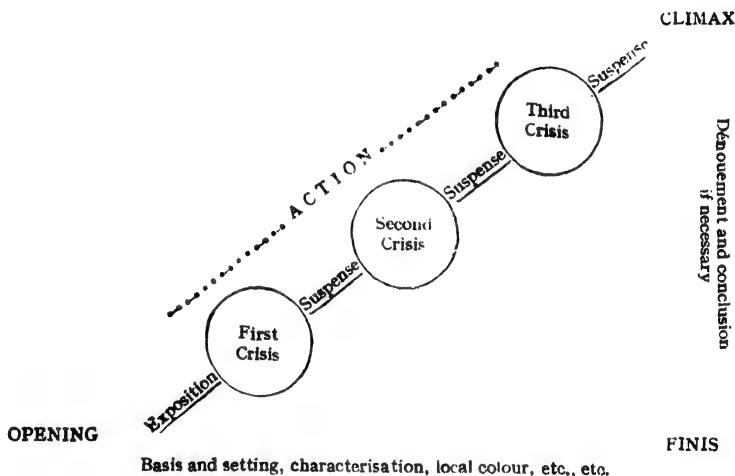
Thus, in *Ligeia* (Edgar Allan Poe) the narrator describes the extraordinary beauty, learning and fascination of, and his devotion to, his wife, Ligeia. Then “Ligeia grew ill” (complication). The reader is thereby prepared for the oncoming crisis, the death of Ligeia.

This is the point where the reader must experience suspense. What is going to happen now ? The writer has lost his beloved wife. The story continues : “After a few months, therefore, of weary and aimless wandering, I purchased, and put in some repair, an abbey, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of England.” He presently marries again, although the memory of Ligeia is with him, night and day. Then Lady Rowena falls ill and, after taking a glass of wine, falls back lifeless (second crisis).

The reader is now on a higher plane of suspense. The action is accelerated. Still obsessed by visions of Ligeia, the distracted husband sees her revive twice, only to sink back into death. Then at the last she revives once more, her fair-haired, blue-eyed beauty changed to the wild, dark magnificence of Ligeia. “These are the full and the black and the wild eyes,” he shrieks aloud,

"of my lost love—of the lady—of the Lady Ligeia."  
(End of suspense, climax.)

The quality of suspense, then, follows the presentation of as many crises as the story may contain. The number of crises is regulated by the requirements of the plot. All good short stories contain one crisis; the majority contain more than one. When there is more than one crisis, the dramatic effect should be heightened by each succeeding crisis. At the same time the action is accelerated.



This diagram—an elaboration of Elinor Mordaunt's theory (see page 51)—shows a conception of the ordinary short story which may be helpful. By "exposition" is meant the rise of interest by either the statement of the problem, or the circumstances which lead up to the first crisis. The base-line represents the thread which should run through the entire story, revealing background,

character, atmosphere, etc., always carefully subordinated to the main interest of the plot. As previously pointed out, the climax may be such as to render any further *dénouement* unnecessary. The climax and *dénouement* are dealt with more fully later.

For the purpose of examining the structural composition of the body of the story, I propose to take the typical form in which character is overshadowed by plot. It was Robert Louis Stevenson's rather drastic theory, by the way, that character should always be subordinate to incident.

Frequently the plot idea develops from character and environment. Many of the best writers prefer this development of plot from character to the development of character from plot. It is a point which every writer must decide for himself. Usually one is guided by the type of story under consideration. Stories with plenty of action and incident are primarily plot stories in which character is of secondary importance; while in stories of character, plot is naturally subordinate to the main interest. It is often difficult to distinguish the two types in the finished product. Character and plot are so closely interwoven and so dependent on each other that it is sometimes impossible to guess whether the writer began with his plot or his characters.

The amount of incident in short stories naturally varies tremendously. On the one hand there is the typical magazine action-story, in which enough incident is often crammed into 5,000 words to fill a full-length novel; and on the other, the study of character, or sketch, in which there is scarcely any incident at all. The character story is often reduced to the level of a



picture in words, although it need not be. Stacy Aumonier's *The Funny Man's Day*, for example, is a delightful revelation of character in which incident plays a large part. But, generally speaking, the story which depends on plot for its effect is the type which the young writer should first study and experiment with. While the static story (character) has its market, and is a satisfying form of expression, the dynamic story (action) is more readily saleable. And as Stevenson himself wrote :

" In character studies the pleasure we take is critical ; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy with courage, suffering, or virtue. But the characters are still themselves, they are not us ; the more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as a spectator. . . . It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire it to happen to ourselves ; some situation that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realised in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters ; then we push the hero aside ; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience ; and then, and then only, do we say that we have been reading a romance."

Let us deal, then, with the story of incident. The first step is to take the plot outline and block it out roughly on the lines of the diagram on page 70. At first the young writer may find it not at all easy to select the crises in the story ; but it should not be difficult to pick out the main crisis and work backwards from that point. Here it will be found that there are two kinds of incidents. One is the incident that belongs to the plot proper, and the other the incident which has to

be introduced to carry the story smoothly and naturally from one stage to another. The latter is invented by the writer as required, and has been called the "developing incident."

The author knows the incidents of his plots before he begins to write, but has to improvise "developing" incidents as the story crystallises into being.

In *The Looking Glass*, by J. D. Beresford, the story of Rachel Deane, a young girl who goes to visit an old aunt of the same name whom she has never seen, we find Rachel standing in front of the looking glass :

With a graceful habitual gesture she put up her hand and lightly touched her cheek with a soft, caressing movement of her finger-tips.

This is a "developing" or contributory incident, on which emphasis happens to be laid by the fact of its coming at the end of the first section of the story. The aunt proves to be "a raddled, repulsive creature," whose "hollow cheeks stiff with powder, lips brightened to a fantastic scarlet," assist in indicating that the old lady "had actually persuaded herself into the delusion that she still had the appearance of a young girl." To sensitive Rachel's dismay, her aunt insists on their remarkable physical resemblance. This preys on the young girl's mind so, that, when we read that the aunt, pausing before the mirror, lifted

her wasted hand and delicately touched her whitened hollow cheek with the tips of her heavily-jewelled fingers,

we are not surprised that "Rachel stared in horror. . . .

Because of that perfect duplication of her own characteristic pose and gesture, the likeness had flashed out clear and unmistakable."

This is the "plot" incident. The "developing" incident which preceded it is subordinate, but necessary to the unfolding of the story. It adds emphasis and is also a link in the chain of interest.

From this simple illustration the function of the "developing" incident may be easily understood. It is dependent on a main plot incident and plays a highly important technical part in the story.

A clear understanding of the difference between plot incident and developing incident will help the young writer to plan out the most difficult structural problem of the body of the story. This is *sequence*. On sequence depends the success of his efforts to create suspense. As soon as a satisfactory sequence-synopsis is drafted out, it will readily be seen between which points in the story the reader must be kept in doubt as to the next complication, whether it be yet another crisis in the story, or the climax itself.

Not that it always requires deliberate effort to create suspense. Very often suspense is created naturally by the action of the story. But although the reader should not be able to say to himself *with certainty*, "I know what's coming next," the effect to aim at is to produce in the reader's mind a sort of premonition of what is going to happen, so that when the next step is revealed, it appears to be the perfectly natural logical outcome of all that has preceded it. The reader must not feel certain of the outcome, or he will lose interest, but there must be sufficient clue in what he has read already to make

the outcome appear inevitable. This applies forcibly to the chief period of suspense which immediately precedes the climax.

A word of warning is necessary at this point. The writer must not deliberately mystify the reader unless it is an integral feature of the plot to do so. Suspense will come about in satisfactory measure as a result of effective disposition of incidents in their fitting order. The problem is not one of suspense, but of sequence.

The Plot Book will come in handy here. Compare the plot summaries you have made with the stories as they appeared. Note the difference in the *sequence* of incident ; how in the actual story a revelation is delayed, how the reader is kept in doubt until the critical moment arrives, and so on. When it is a question of applying the principle in practice there is no infallible rule. An "unconscious sense of judgment" will come to the young writer's rescue ; and, after all, he is the one best qualified to solve the little problems of the story that is exclusively his own. And the problem is usually much simpler than may be imagined.

A more difficult problem is concerned with emotion. It is a first principle that the short story must create some kind of emotion in the reader, whether it be sympathy (in its true sense), horror, joy, laughter, pathos, excitement, or surprise. Anyone, with any sort of story-telling instinct, can scarcely fail to produce some such effect on the ordinary reader ; but a careful balancing and arrangement of all the material that goes to produce emotion is a prime need of good story-telling. Here, again, the indirect method is more effective than the direct. To describe the effect of an apparition say, on

one of the characters, is more vivid than to describe the apparition itself.

"I could not repress a cry of astonishment,"

"He stared, fascinated."

"Her cheeks paled; her limbs stiffened; she was too frightened to utter a sound."

Fiction is full of sentences like these. Carefully handled, they heighten the dramatic effect in a way that direct, unadorned description could not produce. This will not, I hope, prejudice the young writer against a plain, straightforward style of writing. It is in the manner of telling a story that the indirect method is sometimes to be preferred. As far as style (which we come to later) is concerned, there is nothing to beat simplicity.

How is emotion produced? Once more mere formulæ are useless. A study of good fiction will reveal the use of a number of literary devices which may profitably be imitated. The use of sarcasm, exclamations of irritation, exasperation, assist in creating emotional effect. Gesture is frequently expressive of emotion. Thus:

He *clenched his fists* as he . . .

The invalid *shook his head* impatiently.

Johnson *shrugged his shoulders*.

*His hand trembled* as he opened the letter.

"I cannot deal with it now," said Owen, *waving him aside*.

She *snatched* at the paper.

The girl held to him *with stiffened fingers* while a tattoo struck the door.

Dialogue is another useful device to express emotion. The use of the dash to split up speech into fragments is suggestive of emotion.

Henry gasped.

" You mean—Vitongo ? "

" The whole outfit. "

" Vitongo—— ! "

" What t'hell else did you expect ? " \*

The dash gives a kind of gasping effect to the words, and the short, nervous sentences strengthen the impression. The value of restraint in fiction should, however, never be overlooked. Sometimes more can be said in one word than in two or three.

Read as many good short stories as you can. Have a pencil handy, and when you come to a passage that is especially moving or exciting, mark it in the margin. Don't look for such passages deliberately ; note only those which grip your interest as you read them. Then, when you have finished with the story as a reader, come back to it as a student. Note how the effect is produced. If the passage defies satisfactory analysis, put the story away and write that part of it in your own words. When done, compare your own effort with the original. This method is invaluable to the beginner, enabling him, as it does, to approach a problem from the real starting point. It will also show how vitally important is *economy in words*. O. Henry had this wonderful gift of economy in narrative, amounting to genius.

\* From *The Pagan* by John Russell. (*In Dark Places*. Thornton Butterworth).

W. W. Jacobs has it. It is a distinctive mark of the true short story writer.

Maupassant's famous short story, *The Necklace*, is an admirable illustration of what to omit. A man and his wife in humble circumstances are invited to a big official dance. The young husband spends all his money on a frock for her to wear, but she has no jewels. At last she borrows from a friend a superb necklace of diamonds and goes happy to the ball. Arriving home, she finds to her horror that the necklace is lost! Their frantic search and inquiries prove unavailing. To gain time they write to Mme. Forestier, the friend, saying that the clasp is broken and they are having it mended. At the end of a week they have lost all hope. The husband sells all he has, assumes ruinous obligations compromising the rest of his life, in order to replace the necklace. He raises 36,000 francs, and a similar necklace is bought and restored to Mme. Forestier. Then they set to work to pay off their colossal debt. For ten years they endure dire poverty and harsh discomfort, but at last everything is paid off. Then one day the friend meets the wife in the street. "Oh, my poor Mathilde," she cries, "how you have changed!" The poor woman then tells the whole story. Mme. Forestier, strongly moved, took her two hands. "Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth at most five hundred francs!"

The length of this story is 3,000 words. It ends with the sentence quoted in the above summary. Observe how much is omitted here. Maupassant does not go on to tell how Mme. Forestier returned the necklace, nor point the moral of the wasted ten years of laborious

effort and toil. It is true that they could not be restored like the necklace, but Maupassant knew what to omit in the interest of emotional effect.

What to leave out is, indeed, almost as important as what to put in a short story. There can be—and in most stories often are—left out, for instance, big slices of time. The story is not necessarily a consecutive narrative. The scene may be switched somewhere else without any explanation on the writer's part. A single row of asterisks will serve to indicate either lapse of time or change of scene, and is a device frequently employed in the modern short story.

The action, too, should be stripped of all unnecessary or irrelevant matter.

This, it will be remembered, is one of the features of the short story which particularly distinguishes it from the novel. Constant revision and deletion are the best means of reducing a story to proper proportions. Don't be afraid of leaving something to the imagination of the reader. As soon as the story has got into its stride, avoid all explanations and discussions that do not help the action along. Whatever you do, don't put the brake on—it is fatal. Note, for example, the rapidity of the action in the following passage from a story by the late Agnes and Egerton Castle (*Enchanted Casements*, Hutchinson).

"Like an arrow from the bow he sped after Larière, who had shaken hands with his host, and was disappearing into the hotel portals.

"Julian caught him up in the vestibule. He stood aside while the chief Precursor accepted the services of one waiter to



assist him into his driving coat, and of another for the lighting of a cigar. Then a dog-cart, scarcely less dashing than his own, was driven round, and Larilière, mounting, took the reins from the hands of the groom.

"As the man prepared to jump up beside his master, Julian was down the steps in two leaps and arrested him.

" 'One moment, Monsieur de Larilière! One word.'

"The pale glassy eyes looked down at him, and he thought there was a flicker in them, gone as soon as come, of fear.

" 'Speak quick, then,' said the polished bully, at his most insolent, 'for I have a *rendezvous*.'

" 'One word is enough,' said Julian. 'Coward!'"

It may seem superfluous to advise the beginner to remember he is telling a story, but a wide experience of MSS. indicates plainly that such advice is generally needed. So many amateur efforts bury the actual story beneath a mass of "clever" writing, that few editors will take the trouble to disentangle it. It cannot be too often emphasised that the story's the thing.

Conveying the story to the reader is, as Gilbert Frankau has expressed it, best done by a series of "word-pictures."

"The whole process of story-writing," says the author of *Peter Jackson*, "is a conveyance of pictures from the mind of the writer to the mind of his reader. A complete visualisation of the story he means to tell, of the characters who play their part, is absolutely necessary. A writer must be able to see in his mind's eye the whole story. It must be as visible to him as the wood of his writing-desk or the walls of his study. He must know his characters and his scenes so well that he can describe every feature of them.

"This visualisation or seeing process can be either real or imaginary; that is to say, the writer may either describe places and people actually known to him, or places and people that only

exist in his imagination. But in either case, the conveyance of these pictures to the reader's mind must be so sharp that the impression is always *real*."

This pictorial conception of the writer's art may be usefully remembered when the young writer gets into the stride of the story. Making "word-pictures" is a valuable literary exercise. Anything that strikes the writer's imagination : a girl's face, a room, a man ploughing a field, a lighthouse at night, a beggar in the street, all provide subjects for "word-pictures." Self-criticism is difficult, but will be made easier by putting aside one's efforts until they are forgotten. Then, when they are re-read, they should instantly convey a mental picture. If the picture is vague, it fails. It should jump to the eye, as the French say. Cultivate picturisation in fiction—it is well worth while.

So far, so good. But there is so much that cannot be taught that, with these few generalisations, I must leave the subject of writing the body of the story. In many ways it is the most vital part of the story-teller's craft, but beyond drawing attention to established methods and stimulating a study of stories by good authors, one can teach very little. It is one thing to take a manuscript, indicate its defects, and show how they may be remedied : condensation here, deletion there, dialogue in this place, rewriting on different lines in that place ; but in so plastic a medium as the short story, it is impossible to lay down any number of fixed rules and regulations. Particularly is this true of the body of the story. Beginning and end have functions which may be more readily defined, but, provided that the writer tells his story in such a way as to hold the reader's interest,

there can be little adverse criticism of his manner of telling it. The ordinary reader is the ultimate critic, and if he is satisfied, there cannot be much wrong with the story. Molière knew what he was about when he read his manuscripts to his cook.

## CHAPTER III (*Concluded*)

### THE COMPOSITION OF THE SHORT STORY

#### (3) THE CLIMAX

THE construction of the final movement of the short story puts the writer's powers to the severest test of all. The ending will leave a decisive impression on the reader—indeed, it is intended to do so—and whether this be satisfactory or unsatisfactory depends on the writer's skill in handling the most important situation in his story, the climax.

Everything leads up to the climax. All the threads of interest are gathered up and merge into the "point" of the story. The reader should feel a definite emotional shock, whether it be surprise at the final revelation, satisfaction at the triumph of right over might, horror at the tragic outcome, or thrill at reaching the highwater mark of excitement. At this point the writer, to use a colloquialism, dare not let the reader down, except at the risk of ruining the story.

Short stories end in various ways, according to differences of kind. There is the surprise-ending story in which the literary bomb bursts in practically the last line; the mystery or detective story which usually needs

an explanatory *dénouement* recapitulating the circumstances of the problem and untying all the knotted threads of the story; the conventional happy ending of the love story; the philosophic ending, which is the modern equivalent of the now out-of-date moral; and many others which should be familiar to all assiduous readers of fiction.

Each requires different treatment, but all require the most careful handling. As we have seen, the action is accelerated to its highest speed at a point immediately preceding the climax. Every word is vital; a false movement will at once snap the taut elastic of the reader's interest. Every sentence must be subjected to the most critical examination.

The climax, and that part of the story which leads up to it, are, in the opinion of many professional writers, best written at white heat. Some authors prefer to write their endings first. This plan has the merit of fixing the desired final impression and enabling the writer to balance the remainder of the story. An artistically perfect short story must be well balanced; and the balance of a story undoubtedly hinges on the climax.

We have seen how suspense naturally follows the main crisis, and paves the way for the climax. The forces of the story are gathered for the decisive moment; the characters are poised ready for their fate; the reader is prepared for the outcome, although it may be—probably has been—skilfully camouflaged.

The climax must be striking and yet convincing; the reader must be denied the opportunity of criticising it, even unconsciously, as "far-fetched." It must appear inevitable, and in his lightning mental review of the

incidents of the story, the climax must appear to be the one logical and satisfying result of all that has gone before.

It must not be prolonged ; it should be intense and brief ; released, as it were, by a literary trigger. It should have all the precise crispness of the end of one of Euclid's propositions. Note how effectively the climax is handled in *Cap'en Jollyfax's Gun* (see page 143 *et Seq.*).

Climax is the one point of a short story which can be easily identified. It is a kind of high-water mark of interest. Here again the student should make a careful study of the methods of well known writers, to see how climax is handled by experts, and apply the knowledge thus gained to his own work.

Immediately following the climax the reader's interest inevitably relaxes. Suspense is all over ; the tale is done. Delay is now fatal, and if there is anything more to add it must be done quickly.

Anything that succeeds the climax is known as either *Dénouement* or Conclusion. As we have seen, the climax itself may end the story, and thus render further *dénouement* and conclusion unnecessary. Sometimes, however, a story will require a word or two of final explanation, a neat rounding off, and a dismissal of the characters.

The object of the *dénouement* (untying) is to remove any doubts that may linger in the reader's mind ; it serves a purely explanatory purpose. Some critics assert that as no explanation should be necessary subsequent to the climax, the *dénouement* is not properly a feature of the short story ; but this is surely too hasty a judgment. Many of our best short stories have a *dénouement*

which could not conceivably be dispensed with or inserted elsewhere in the story. Besides, an artistic effect may often be obtained by this means and add to the quality of the story.

The *dénouement* is not a separate part of the short story, but should be laid on the foundations of "key sentences" in the body of the narrative. "Key sentences" may be either positive or negative; that is, they may provide a genuine clue to the ultimate *dénouement*, or a false clue. It is quite a legitimate device to lay false clues in order to camouflage the real outcome and sustain the reader's interest. Note, for instance, how ingeniously the suggestion of "one boy at least formed a dark project of hoarding pennies, buying powder, escaping by perilous descent from his bedroom window, and firing Cap'en Jollyfax's gun lawlessly in the depth of night," lays a false trail for the reader of *Cap'en Jollyfax's Gun*.\* With the swift rise of the action to the climax, "The gun! It was the gun! Somebody had fired it! Those boys—those rascal boys, rascalion boys, cheeky boys, plaguey boys, villainous, accursed, infernal boys!" the reader, with the key sentence at the back of his mind, jumps immediately to the wrong conclusion—which is as it should be.

Any preliminary reference to an incident, scene, or character that plays an important part later in the story, is a "key sentence."

A keen sense of the dramatic is the best guide to devising the *dénouement* and conclusion. The dramatic quality of a short story centres almost entirely in its

\* See Chapter VIII.

last phase. With the speeding up of the action, the story joins issue with the drama. It is a tense, emotional moment for both writer and reader.

The beginner should carefully examine a number of good short stories and study for himself the treatment of *dénouement*. He will find that it does not always necessarily make a disclosure ; it may take the form of a hint of future events ; it may even leave the reader in doubt ; point a moral ; or merely satisfy the emotions. But whatever form it may take, it must be in harmony with the rest of the story, and be told in as few words as possible.

Conclusion is usually the final polishing touch to the short story. Short story writing has, indeed, been compared with the art of the lapidary who industriously polishes and polishes his stone. The conclusion of a story should leave a pleasant and satisfying taste in the reader's mouth. It is often used as a device to "get rid of the characters," always a problem for the fiction writer.

Whether a story requires a *dénouement*, or conclusion, or both, will naturally depend on the story itself. The writer's judgment will seldom be at fault if he has any writing instinct at all. Roughly, dramatic stories end at the climax, which is thus identical with the conclusion ; humorous stories require conclusion, but little or no *dénouement* ; mystery stories require *dénouement* without a formal conclusion ; love stories and adventure stories usually contain both. But the exceptions are almost as numerous, and it is impossible to legislate definitely on a point which only the requirements of the individual story and the writer's own judgment can decide.



The three phases of the ending of a story—climax, *dénouement* and conclusion—thus vary with the requirements of each individual story. Of the three, climax is unquestionably the most important. Usually, *dénouement* predominates over conclusion, the latter being a literary trimming, and often not vital to the composition of the story. Sometimes the writer may feel that a final touch of characterisation is necessary, and will thus prolong the conclusion. In Eden Phillpotts' story, *The Rope*, a tale of a West-country hangman, whose rope is stolen from him by the desperate wife of the man he is on his way to hang, in order to give the condemned man a day or two's grace, the climax :

"Hast heard the great news?" she asked. But he had not, and so it happened that Tom West's wife was able to tell how another man—the chap by the name of Ned Rivers, a fellow-labourer with her husband—had come forward and made a clean breast, and confessed to the slaughter of the sheep,

tells the reader all he wants to know, *i.e.*, that the innocent man was saved. No *dénouement* is necessary, but it is plain that the author feels we ought to have a final impression of the kindly, philosophic hangman, and so we have the conclusion :

"'Twas a plot against my Tom," she said. "And the man went down to the prison yesterday at noon and gave himself up for the crime, because his fearful remorse after his sin had made him want to die. And my Tom will be free come to-morrow week! And 'twas me as saved his life after all, Hangman Merdle!"

"And so you did, then," admitted the executioner. "And nobody better pleased than me, I'm sure. How's your babby?"

"He's all right. And I've been allowed to see my husband, and he's terrible interested in it all, and will be very proud if

you can come an' drink a dish of tea along with us and a few neighbours next week."

"Next week? No," answered the other, handling his restored rope. "If what you tell me be true, I'm free to go on to Plymouth by this night's coach. But when business calls me this way again I shall be very pleased to have a tell along with you and your chap. Let it be a lesson to us all to trust in God and our wives, ma'am!"

A typical use of climax, *dénouement* and conclusion is the final movement of O. Henry's *Vanity and Some Sables* (a poor title, by the way). It is the story of "Kid" Brady, who has been reformed by his sweetheart Molly. Kid hates cheap things. After eight months "with no symptoms of backsliding," the Kid brings Molly a mysterious parcel. They are Russian sables, the real thing, he tells her, worth 425 dollars. Molly, at first suspicious, calms her doubts. Sables are soothing. A detective follows them and arrests him on a charge of stealing a thousand-dollar set of sables from a house in West Seventh Street. Kid indignantly denies it, declares he bought them. The detective offers him a chance of proving his story by going to the place he bought them from. Confused, the Kid admits the theft. They meet Policeman Kohen; the detective signs to him for assistance. Then:

"Sure," said Kohen, "I hear about those saples dat vas stolen. You say you have dem here?"

Beginning of  
climax.      Policeman Kohen took the end of Molly's late scarf in his hands and looked at it closely. "Once," he said, "I sold furs in Sixth Avenue. Yes, dese are saples. Dey come from Alaska. Dis scarf is vort twelve dollars and dis muff——"

Climax. "Biff," came the palm of the Kid's powerful hand upon the policeman's mouth. Kohen staggered and rallied. Molly screamed. The detective threw himself upon Brady and with Kohen's aid got the nippers on his wrist.

"The scarf is vort twelve dollars and the muff is vort nine dollars," persisted the policeman. "Vot is dis talk of thousand dollars saples?"

The Kid sat upon a pile of lumber and his face turned dark red.

End of climax.

"Correct, Solomonski," he declared viciously. "I paid twenty-one dollars fifty for the set. I'd rather have got six months and not have told it."

Beginning of *dénouement*.  
Explanation.

"Me, the swell guy that wouldn't look at anything cheap! I'm a plain bluffer. Moll—my salary couldn't spell sables in Russian."

Molly cast herself upon his neck.

"What do I care for all the sables and money in the world?" she cried. "It's my Kiddy I want. Oh, you dear, stuck-up, crazy block-head!"

Finding of "stolen" sables the disclosure.  
End of *dénouement*.

"You can take dose nippers off," said Kohen to the detective. "Before I leat de station de report come in dat de lady vind her saples—hanging in her wardrobe. Young man, I excuse you dat punch in my face—dis von time."

Conclusion.

Ransom landed Molly her furs. Her eyes were smiling upon the Kid. She wound the scarf and threw the end over her left shoulder with a duchess's grace.

(Note how the last two paragraphs "get rid" of the characters).

"A couple of young vools," said Policeman Kohen to Ransom, "come on away."

A type of story already referred to, in which climax, *dénouement* and conclusion are identical, is the surprise-ending story. A typical surprise-ending story is Michael Arlen's amusing *The Luck of Captain Fortune*. At a night-club, a man and woman notice a "tall, dark young man whose dark eyes were wet with tears." Their curiosity is aroused, and they persuade the stranger to join their table and presently to tell his sad story. He begins: "My story concerns a man and a woman. The man loved the woman." He describes with emotion her rare beauty, charm and distinction, and her ambition. It was to shine in politics! She could speak divinely, but she simply could not prepare a speech. The man who loved her came to the rescue, wrote her speeches for her. "He was a man of ideas. He had a brain like Clapham Junction, going this way and that way and every way at the same time; and he could, no doubt, have made a great political name for himself; but he was by nature a soldier, and by temperament adventurous, so that it pleased him infinitely more to 'help' the lady of his dreams to political fame rather than to bid for it in his own person.

"But another soldier came into her life—the most fearless soldier of our time, it has been said. But whether it was that he was the most fearless or the luckiest, we cannot tell. He himself insists on his luck. 'I cannot lose,' he is reported to have said, sometimes unhappily. Whatever he touched became a jewel in his hand; whatever he ventured, he won. A name never expressed a man more perfectly—Victor Fortune! Captain Fortune, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., etc. . . ."

With almost a sob of emotion the stranger describes

how three weeks later "her old friend, her 'helper,' was stunned to read of the engagement of the lady to Captain Fortune, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., etc." He was stunned; then frantically he rushed to her house. . . . She was very sorry about it all, she said. She was frightfully sorry. But she had fallen in love. Victor Fortune. . . .

"And so he went away, her friend, never to return. He never has returned. He never will return. And Captain Fortune married his lady, the lady of his dream. . . ."

The tears "smouldered in those dark eyes," and they thought he was going to break down. "Of course," he whispered, "she has never been able to make a speech since. How could she? Without her old friend she is just a lovely woman, a lovely woman whose life centres in her care for Captain Fortune. And her old friend has gone out of her life, he who loved her and still loves her, never to return, never. . . ."

Silently they watched him go. Then the *maitre d'hôtel* chanced by their table. They asked who he was.

"That, madam," said the agreeable and polished M. Risotto, "is Captain Fortune, the most gallant gentleman in England. . . ."

No synopsis can do justice to the ingenuity of the surprise-ending.

O. Henry excels in this type of story, but his surprise-endings must be studied with care. He was a genius, and genius cannot be imitated. Imitations of O. Henry usually prove to be merely glorified anecdotes.

So many short stories end with a sting in their tail that the beginner will do well to make a close study of this popular form. It is a type of story not difficult to

write, but the handling of the ending is all-important. It must be dramatic, or, to use an Americanism, it must have "punch." This effect is best obtained in as few words as possible.

Restraint is vital in the handling of the ending. A word too much and pathos becomes bathos, tragedy becomes farce. I know of no better illustration in literature of the value of restraint than the dramatic simplicity of Thackeray's ending to a chapter of *Vanity Fair*:

No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

The ending of a short story brings us back to the beginning. It is a new starting-point for the writer. The word *Finis* does not set the seal on his work. Revision is the next step—and a very important one, too.

A happy minority of authors are spared the necessity of revising their labours, but the number of stories that require no revision at all must be exceedingly small. The finished product nearly always differs slightly from the original conception. Stories have a knack of writing themselves. It is, in fact, a common occurrence for the writer to decide, while a story is in full swing, to recast it entirely. Points crop up as one goes along, one situation suggests another, characters refuse to be drawn in a certain way—and if the alteration be an improvement, the story may have to be set on different lines. So that when the writer has satisfactorily disposed of the ending

of his story, he must prepare to revise the whole in perhaps a new light.

Even when the story unfolds itself according to plan, a hundred and one little touches may be necessary to weld it into one artistic whole. The question of proportion, or balance, can never be satisfactorily decided until the actual writing is all complete. Deletions, omissions, condensation, expansion, for all of these the story must be carefully tested and adjusted.

The natural anxiety of the writer to "get the thing finished" leads many beginners to plunge immediately into the work of revision. This, I think, is a mistake. If possible, the story should be put away and not looked at for several days at least. It is impossible to revise coolly and judiciously while one is hot with the labour of writing the story. The MS. should be buried away for as long as possible, say ten days to a fortnight. (Needless to say this does not apply to stories which an editor has commissioned, and for which he may be waiting.) Then, and then only, should revision be begun.

This plan has the advantage of enabling the writer to view his own work with detachment. With any critical acumen at all he will be able to put his finger on the weak spots of a story. He will approach the story in the rôle of a reader, and should thereby be able to see more readily what finishing touches the MS. requires. The correction of mistakes, deletions here, compressions there, a word of explanation at this point, a descriptive touch at that, all will flow more smoothly from his pen as a result of the enforced interval between writing and revising.

Another excellent plan is reading aloud. I know of

no more effective way of testing the smoothness of a story than this. The ear is alert to every harshness of phrase, awkwardness of construction, and gaps in the texture of the story itself. It is, in fact, a severe test of the merit of a short story and no opportunity should be lost of reading your efforts aloud to a discerning critic. Failing such a friend in need, fall back on yourself, and enlist the critical aid of your own hearing.

One word more: the much-abused rejection slip, which may be all that your early efforts will reap, is really a friend in disguise. If all the "possible" markets for your story indicate a unanimous "No," then regard the formal printed slip as a signpost pointing to the story. Follow the trail and it will bring you to errors of commission or of omission. And the matter may be as important as the former. Don't say to yourself: "I can see nothing wrong with the story"; but ask yourself: "Is there anything *right* with it?"



## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTER

THE importance of "human interest" in the story has already been emphasised. And this interest reveals itself most prominently in the characters themselves. The reader is in some ways more interested in the characters than in what happens to them; at any rate, it would be true to say that the reader must believe in the characters and have sympathy with them before he can go on with the story. Even in that type of story which concerns itself least with character, *viz.*, the action-story, there must be sufficient plausibility and reality about the characters to justify their existence. At the other extreme, in stories which definitely exploit character as their theme, the problem of characterisation becomes supremely important.

Character, as we have seen, may be created in a variety of ways, by description, suggestion, dialogue, and action. Of these the least effective is undoubtedly description. The reader will more readily judge people by what they say and do than by what is said about them by the writer. It must not be thought, however, that description is to be discarded altogether. Used in conjunction with other methods it can be made very

effective. Undoubtedly the reader likes to know what the characters look like, and a description of physical appearance may usefully convey a key to character.

Charles Dickens, although primarily a novelist, is an excellent model in this respect. His pen-picture of Mr. Squeers is illuminating :

Mr. Squeers' appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental : being of a greenish-grey, and in shape resembling the fanlight of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size ; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of scholastic black ; but his coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable.

Observe again how pregnant with the suggestion of character is this short descriptive paragraph from Leonard Merrick :

The advertiser—who, it transpired, called himself Armytage—was evidently attired for the occasion. He wore a frock-coat, in combination with a summer waistcoat, much crumpled, and the trousers of a tweed suit. A garnet pin ornamented the wrong portion of a made-up tie.

In a few strokes Leonard Merrick creates a living

picture of the pseudo-genteel, shabby, rascally theatrical agent.

Mr. W. Clifford Poulton, the well known critic, points an apt lesson from Thackeray. He says :

" Thackeray sketches Sir Pitt Crawley's appearance, and some of his character as well, in forty-two words :

. . . . a man in drab breeches and gaiters, and with a dirty old cravat, a foul old neck-cloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.

The man stands before us complete. The first portion of the passage points out the negative qualities : the man doesn't worry about new clothes, or even to clean his old ones ; to have such an intimate thing as a neckcloth washed, or to shave. . All this might spring from carelessness, and produce an unpleasant effect without being morally repulsive ; but then we get the statement that he leers, and that his mouth is perpetually ' on the grin.'

" The use of the word *grin* here, instead of *smile*, is almost as important as that of the word *beating* in Burke's\* famous passage referring to the Angel of Death being abroad : ' I can almost hear the beating of his wings,' which it was observed would have immediately become ridiculous if he had said *flapping*. Study the interaction of one word upon another. A grin, and twinkling eyes, are by no means repellent characteristics ; but when the grin is perpetual, the face is red and leering, and the whole is completed by a shining bald head above a foul neckcloth below, a definitely unpleasing effect is produced. We feel that we dislike Sir Pitt as thoroughly as if he had been introduced by a whole string of denunciatory adjectives ; and we believe in him much more firmly than we should in the latter case."

So real is the pen-picture of Sir Pitt Crawley that it is quite conceivable he had his prototype in real life.

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\* It was John Bright, not Burke.

The majority of authors draw unreservedly on real characters. The young writer should assiduously practise the invaluable art of personal observation. Study all the varying types of humanity with whom you come in contact. Try to visualise their outlook on life; compare the philosophy of the tramp with that of the footman. Note the differing conditions under which people live. Observe their clothes—an unfailing index to character—their habits, prejudices, and amusements. Note particularly how little concrete things reveal character—a cheap brooch, a monocle, a man's purse, a gold-topped stick, a *décolleté* dress, rouge and perfume, a button-hole, a celluloid collar, a ready-made bow tie—all such small details are invaluable in depicting characters and types.

This should be supplemented by continuous practice in the even more important art of transferring any mental impressions to paper. Observe continuously and thoroughly; neglect no material, however commonplace; and aim at creating a picture in writing when you come to record your observations. Write pen-pictures of your friends (secretly!); read your work critically; try to work yourself into a state of healthy dissatisfaction. For only by patient and continuous effort and the ruthless scrapping of poor work can this important branch of the writer's art be cultivated. Avoid *clichés* and hackneyed phrases at all costs. Try to express yourself distinctively, yet keep to a good plain style of writing. Avoid trite similes; don't describe someone "trembling like a leaf," or "eating like a hog," or "talking nineteen to the dozen." That is the sure way to miss the target.

Don't neglect the classics. Read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a masterpiece of characterisation; the essays of Steele and Addison and the *Spectator* papers, which contain some of the first (and best) attempts to delineate character in prose, notably Sir Roger de Coverley. Shakespeare's plays are a goldmine; read Balzac, Swift, Landor (*Imaginary Conversations*); and remember the most fertile source of all, the Bible.

Don't be afraid to write in order to destroy. In the short story a whole descriptive essay will probably have to boil down to a single paragraph. Practise "cutting" your work, retaining only what is essential and significant. All this is invaluable preparation.

Of course, characters stand out in novels more than in short stories. In short stories the type that is remembered is usually one that recurs in a series, e.g., Sherlock Holmes, Captain Kettle, Bindle. Kipps, Mr. Polly, Mark Sabre, Uncle Toby and Dickens' and Thackeray's characters loom larger in our recollection than the miniature portraits of the short story.

The presentation of character in fiction is a very delicate process, comparable, perhaps, with the fine art of the etcher, of whom Seymour Haden has written: "Every stroke he makes tells strongly against him if it be bad, or proves him to be a master if it be good. In no branch of art does a touch go for so much. The necessity for a rigid selection is therefore constantly present to his mind. If one stroke in the right place tell more for him than ten in the wrong, it would seem to follow that that single stroke is a more learned stroke than the scores of ten by which he would have arrived at his end."

What the etcher does with his needle the writer should try to do with his pen. But although the art of etching suggests a clear-cut line-drawing in one colour, the writer must not be afraid of using half-tones.

In the good old Lyceum melodrama the villain was always a deep-dyed scoundrel, the hero a man of unblemished virtue and courage, the heroine equally consistent throughout the piece. The characters were, so to speak, stamped black and white, good or bad. That is not the way to establish character in the short story. The reader will soon tire of mere puppets. The villain must have a motive to inspire him to acts of cunning or wickedness ; his attitude must be understandable, at any rate. He must be a human being.

This may seem elementary advice, but of the thousands of MSS. which pass through any editor's hands a substantial percentage deal with characters which are so colourless and devoid of reality that they might just as well have been labelled " Villain," " Hero," " Heroine," and so on. Probably the optimistic amateurs who bombard editors with these futile MSS. have in their own mind's eye some sort of conception of what their characters look like and how they behave, but it is quite certain that they fail completely in portraying them to the reader.

And yet the portrayal of character is so easy ! At every turn of the story the writer is given an opening to reveal yet another glimpse of character. Dialogue, action, suggestion—every new development can be made to throw light on the people in the story. Every word they utter, every little thing they do, whether it be diving into a rushing river, or fidgeting nervously with

a paper-knife, can be made to serve the purpose of characterisation.

Personal traits and mannerisms serve as useful identification marks. If your hero has a habit of stroking his chin meditatively, every time you introduce this gesture it enables the reader to visualise him quite plainly. Similarly individual mannerisms of speech may be repeated to enable the reader to identify a character. All these little pictorial touches have a direct bearing on character.

Such gestures must be distinctive and yet seem true to life. We have all met the man who bites off the end of his cigar, the woman who fumbles in her purse for something she can never find, the old gentleman who always polishes his spectacles before putting them on. It is quite a simple matter to transfer such real life characteristics to our fictional creations. On the other hand, the office boy who is always whistling and the self-conscious curate who precedes everything he says with "Ahem" are, so to speak, literary *clichés*, and should be avoided.

The process of presenting character, then, is a gradual one. Provided that the student realises the way to set to work, it should not be overwhelmingly difficult. There are a hundred and one opportunities which occur in the writing of a short story to enable the writer to distribute the little suggestive pictorial touches which are the whole art of conveying physical resemblance and character.

In a short story character should stand out in sharp relief. This applies especially to the leading personages of the story. This prominence is usually achieved

by the contrast of one character with another, each as a foil to the rest.

But it may be argued, character is a complex thing, much too vague and contradictory to be expressed in a single stroke. That is true ; but for the purpose of the short story it is enough to stamp the character with one salient characteristic, stressing this trait throughout, and enabling the character to stand as the expression of this particular quality, good or bad. Thus one person may represent Cruelty, another Devotion, another Ambition, and so on. This is a modern and more subtle variation of the old Morality Plays. One well known writer, in fact, is said to give his characters the names of such virtues and vices in order to assist in this process of embodiment ; merely deleting the labels and substituting names when the story reaches the revision stage.

Not in every short story is the contrast between character so sharp and distinct, but in the story that is professedly a study of character it is a very important aspect to consider. The more slender the plot, the more important does character become. In *The Portrait of a Coward*, by Leonard Merrick, the plot, slight in itself, is subordinated to the main purpose of revealing character. Leonard Merrick portrays a woman who, as a girl, was married against her will to a man with two daughters. When he died she was glad but dared not show it. Year by year, she and her step-daughters (who grow up into odious prigs) go to the cemetery to lay flowers on his grave. • The poor woman is overawed by their sanctimonious piety and dares not protest against the hypocrisy of her own grief. Her only hope is that the girls may get married. But they are plain and unattractive and



refuse to go out anywhere. At last the doctor orders them away to the seaside and the poor woman breathes a hope that they may meet someone and make an attachment ; for her it means Freedom. But the unexpected happens. Romance enters not their life, but hers. A man falls in love with her, and she with him. Presently she promises to marry him. But she must go home with the girls to "settle things" and break the news. And when it comes to the point she cannot. She tells them of the proposal.

"Oh . . . after you had gone from Harrogate, Mr. Murray asked me to marry him."

The silence seemed to her to last for minutes.

"To do *what*?" gasped Amy.

"Well," exclaimed Mildred, "it didn't take long to put *him* in his place, I hope. What impudence!"

"He had an impudent look," said Amy.

And then later :

After breakfast, when the beds were being made, Mrs. Findon said : "Doreen, if anybody calls this morning—a gentleman—say we're away from home for a few days. You understand ? For a few days—all of us. Oh, and Doreen, if he asks where we are, you don't know."

And finally, Merrick's bitterly ironic ending :

For each Sunday she goes with the Misses Findon to gaze upon the grave ; and on their return while the Misses Findon sit by the fireplace, speaking at long intervals, in subdued tones, their stepmother stares from the window, knowing that her pretence of mourning a husband will continue as long as she lives. And when she looks back on her romance, she marvels—not at the recreancy of her submission, but that once she briefly dared to dream she would rebel.

Every young writer with any inclination towards stories of character should read this story. The contrast between the pathetic figure of the woman who was a coward and the two mean-spirited, selfish and obstinate daughters is drawn by a master hand. The whole picture is real, thanks in no small part to the brilliant delineation of character.

The writer who wishes to excel in the portrayal of character must be a keen observer of human nature.

is an abundance of material to select from, perhaps too much. Very often the beginner cannot see the wood for the trees. There are two kinds of characters, real and imaginary. Both should be studied, but the former with caution. Although it is no doubt the practice of many authors to derive characters from real life, the complete and faithful portrayal of a living person in fiction is rendered almost impracticable by the very nature and limitations of fiction. Nevertheless, fiction does derive its inspiration from life itself, and to a very large extent the writer is dependent on his observation of living people when he sets out to depict characters in a story. Just as an entertainer on the stage will mimic easily recognisable types of men and women, so may the writer people his stories with individual types.

The truly enormous quantity of fiction that has already been written will also provide the student with a fruitful source of inspiration. In the creation of types many modern writers owe a great debt (perhaps unconsciously) to the creations of other authors. W. J. Locke's Aristide Pujol is a modern and Gallic Mark Tapley; Stephen McKenna's Sonia owes something to

Becky Sharp ; Bindle might have stepped from the pages of Charles Dickens.

But it is perhaps in the method of presentation that the young writer may most profitably study the work of others.

In addition to physical description character may be revealed in dialogue (see the next chapter on Dialogue, page 109) or action. Just as in real life people are judged by what they say and do, so in fiction the reader unconsciously bases his estimate of a character on his speech and actions. It is therefore important to bear in mind that every word uttered and every action performed by a major character reflect directly on the character itself.

One of the privileges of the writer is to express the thoughts of his characters. Perhaps thought even more than speech provides a strong clue to character. Sentences which begin "Now he realised . . .", "He began to wonder whether . . .", "His thoughts travelled to . . .", "She hesitated whether to tell . . ." are typical sentence forms which directly assist in throwing light on character.

"Actions speak louder than words" is a proverb which applies to the revelation of character. You may describe a man as being honourable and loyal, but the reader won't believe you if he robs his friends and deserts his wife. It should be obvious that what your characters *do* must be in harmony with what they say, and with what you, as the writer, say about them.

How many characters should a short story contain ? This naturally depends upon the length and scope of the story and the requirements of the plot. If you have

gone plot-hunting on the right lines you should not have an unduly large or small number of characters. Generally speaking, the number should be restricted as far as possible. Two or three main characters should be enough. A certain number of minor characters—"supers"—are often necessary to the story, but they should be kept strictly in the background. As on the stage the lime-light is thrown on the leading actors, to the exclusion of the minor characters, servants, messengers, and so on, so in the short story the reader's attention should not be allowed to wander from the protagonists of the story.

Sometimes when writing a story a certain character takes the writer's fancy and he is tempted to develop it at the expense of more important characters. It might be the heroine's sister, a young schoolgirl, who has some amusing things to say. This temptation should be ruthlessly overcome. Characters must be kept in their places. This is the time to recall the cynical advice of the critic who said "If a thing particularly pleases you, *have it out.*"

Naming characters is quite a fascinating pastime. Needless to say, names have to be chosen with great care, for there is a good deal in a name, in spite of Shakespeare. Certain names have a strong suggestion of character about them; Martha suggests the dutiful housewife; Dolly, Betty or Kitty, the rather frivolous young lady; John, the strong, silent man; Tom, the honest, straightforward son of the people; Grace, the quiet, unassuming girl; Basil, Rupert or Eric, the gay, light-hearted youngster; Claude, Algernon or Cuthbert, the dandy; Henry, the henpecked husband; Philip, the

earnest student ; Marcus, the substantial man of business ; Jake, Jasper, Sebastian, the villain of the piece ; these can be multiplied indefinitely. The psychological influence of names is, therefore, very important. Naming characters, however, does not as a rule present many difficulties even to the beginner.

## CHAPTER V

### DIALOGUE

"WHAT is the use of a book," complained Alice in Wonderland, "without conversation in it?"

Conversation or dialogue of some kind is necessary to most short stories, and this branch of short story writing deserves close study. A page of dialogue is attractive to the editorial eye. But dialogue must not be introduced into a story without a definite purpose. Passages of writing between quotation marks do not in themselves constitute dialogue. Dialogue serves various purposes. It reveals character, conveys both setting and information, accelerates the action, and gives a realistic effect to the story as a whole.

Dialogue thus serves three main purposes:

#### (I) TO REVEAL CHARACTER

Character is best revealed by dialogue. (See page 106, chapter on Character.) An anonymous writer once said: "It is not necessary to say that a woman is a snarling, grumpy person. Bring in the old lady and let her snarl." Speech is human interest, and human interest sells stories. Every word uttered by a leading character must be significant and help to

strengthen the reader's impression of the character. The minor characters may talk more or less alike, but the speech of the leading actors in the fiction drama must be individual. Not a syllable should be wasted.

Having made up your mind about your characters, and having determined their various qualities—ambition—avarice—fear—devotion—perseverance—and so on, you must set out, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, to express these qualities in the words you put into their mouths.

Thus you will create the personality of your characters in the most effective way, *i.e.*, by dialogue. The reader should be able to identify a character the moment he or she reappears in the story. To obtain this effect, dialogue must—so to speak—be on different levels. The individuality of dialogue is nowhere better illustrated than in the works of Charles Dickens. Mr. Pecksniff, for example, never says anything that could be confused with the speech of other participants in the dialogue. The speech of Micawber, Sam Weller, Mrs. Gamp, serves in each instance as a clearly distinctive label. This is the effect to aim at.

Within the limited scope of the short story this, I admit, becomes very difficult. Where practically every word must carry its own meaning, it is no easy matter to paint in the little characteristic touches that mean so much. We cannot all be Kiplings or Bennetts; but if we appreciate the importance of dialogue and make a serious attempt to fulfil its proper function, there is no doubt that we shall be working on the right lines.

Note, for instance, how skilfully the greed of Ameera's mother and the grief of John Holden are conveyed by

### SHORT STORY WRITING FOR PROFIT III

dialogue in this passage from Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy* :

" Is she dead, Sahib ? "

" She is dead."

" Then I will mourn, and afterwards take an inventory of the furniture in this house. For that will be mine. The sahib does not mean to resume it ? It is so little, so very little, Sahib, and I am an old woman. I would like to lie softly."

" For the mercy of God be silent a while. Go out and mourn where I cannot hear."

" Sahib, she will be buried in four hours."

" I know the custom. I shall go ere she is taken away. That matter is in thy hands. Look to it that the bed on which—on which she lies——"

" Aha ! That beautiful red-lacquered bed. I have long desired——"

" That the bed is left here untouched for my disposal. All else in the house is thine. Hire a cart, take everything, go hence, and before sunrise let there be nothing in this house but that which I have ordered thee to respect."

" I am an old woman. I would stay at least for the days of mourning, and the rains have just broken. Whither shall I go ? "

" What is that to me ? My order is that there is a going. The house gear is worth a thousand rupees, and my orderly shall bring thee a hundred rupees to-night."

" That is very little. Think of the cart-hire."

" It shall be nothing unless thou goest, and with speed. O woman, get hence, and leave me with my dead ! "

To take a few elementary instances, let us suppose that we want to present characters as being variously *Cowardly, Ambitious, Namby-Pamby, Callous, etc.*

#### COWARDLY.

" Take care ! " cried the old man. " They say that old Martin's ghost haunts that passage." He peered nervously over Jim's shoulder. " If you must—what's



that ? That white shape—look ! Oh, God, have mercy

The abrupt, dislocated dialogue imparts the desired emotional effect.

NAMBY-PAMBY.

"Oh, rather," said Algy. "A gel always notices a chap's clothes, what ? Ties and socks to match, and all that sort of thing, doncher know. Oh, rather !"

CALLOUS.

"You will do as I tell you," said Brewster calmly. "When you come back with the money I will listen to you. Until then—" He shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"But—but the police ? And my sister—what will she do ?"

"That is your affair. I have nothing to add to what I have already said."

The calm, dispassionate words contrast with the broken, incoherent utterances of the other.

Dialogue should, in this way, match and blend with the personalities you wish to reveal in your writing.

This feature of short story writing is entirely modern. Dialogue in the historical romances of Scott, the stories of Robert Louis Stevenson, Edgar Allan Poe, and the older school of short story writers is curiously artificial. All the characters speak on the same level, no attempt being made to delineate character by means of dialogue.

But, you may object, where can I find a better model than Stevenson ?

For style, narrative, vocabulary, I agree ; but

not for dialogue. If the title and characters' names of, say *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* were changed and the story submitted as an original MS. to a magazine editor who happened not to have read R. L. Stevenson's famous story, I doubt very much if it would be accepted. It is an excellent story, but it does not conform to modern magazine standards. The dialogue in itself "dates" it, and would put it out of court.

The recent development of the short story appears to be bringing character into greater prominence. Thus fiction in which dialogue has a direct bearing on events is giving place to fiction in which dialogue helps in revealing character. This, then, is one of the main purposes of modern dialogue.

A frequent, but less important, object of dialogue is :

## (2) TO CONVEY SETTING

Describing the setting by means of dialogue needs little explanation.

By means of dialogue which illuminates character, additional realism is imparted to the description of scenery or background. Thus in a story by W. W. Jacobs :

" I hate this place," said she, breaking a long silence. " It is so dismal—so uncanny. Do you know, I wouldn't dare to sit here alone, Jem. I should imagine that all sorts of dreadful things were hidden behind the bushes and trees, waiting to spring out on me. Ugh ! "

In the same way basic information necessary to the story's development may be conveyed to the reader through the mouths of the characters.

The third object of dialogue is :

(3) TO CARRY ON OR ACCELERATE THE ACTION

This is a typical use of dialogue, and the majority of short stories contain several examples. To take an instance almost at random :

" Throw a stone down, sergeant. I want to judge how deep it is," he ordered.

When it is necessary to increase the speed of the action, succinct dialogue will often come to the writer's assistance.

Dialogue is one of those things easy to grasp in theory, but difficult to apply in practice. Always assuming that it is not worth while trying to write fiction unless one *can* write, or *wants* to write, the best advice I can give the beginner is to study closely the methods of the best writers. First, as a reader, in order to judge the effect; then more critically and analytically as a student.

Read W. W. Jacobs, whose dialogue is a model. Jacobs is the literary equivalent of Phil May, who, when he had finished a drawing, went over it with scrupulous care and rubbed out every line that was not absolutely indispensable. W. W. Jacobs' stories are like that ; his economy in words is the delight of every writer who appreciates craftsmanship. Other authors to study for the use of dialogue are : Anthony Hope (*The Dolly Dialogues*), E. F. Benson (*Dodo, Miss Mapp, Queen Lucia*, especially), " Saki " (H. H. Munro), Owen Oliver, Leonard Merrick, John Buchan, O. Henry, Jack London and P. G. Wodehouse.

Conversation in fiction must appear real and true to life, although it is as a matter of fact anything but strictly true to life. The faithful reproduction of ordinary human speech would appear ridiculous on the printed page. (See Chapter I., page 28.) One cannot repeat too often that art is a continuous process of selection. The dialogue of fiction is the result of drastic boiling down of ordinary speech. Only what is significant may remain; all the innumerable irrelevances, repetitions, ejaculations, grammatical errors and meaningless phrases must be pruned away before dialogue can be written down. I find it very hard to make some young writers believe this, but fortunately something once happened which should convince all "realistic" sceptics.

A certain local councillor complained of the unfair treatment of a newspaper which "edited" his speeches. The newspaper took a neat revenge by reproducing his next speech exactly as he delivered it, omitting nothing, and faithfully transferring into print all the "ums" and "ers" and incoherencies and errors! If, then, a prepared speech can be made to appear absurd, what about spontaneous conversation?

Many people seem to find dialogue hard to write. To some writers fresh sparkling dialogue comes naturally; others strive laboriously only to produce stodge. Dialogue must be spontaneous to be successful. Therefore, revision is not desirable. If your dialogue does not develop naturally, scrap it and begin again.

To any writer whose dialogue is his weak point, I recommend the plan of inventing imaginary conversations between well known characters in fiction. The characterisation is, so to speak, ready-made; it only

remains to put appropriate and characteristic remarks in their mouths.

Invent, say, discussions between Kipps and Mr. Micawber, Captain Kettle and Raffles, Bindle and the Night Watchman. Don't merely imitate their manner of utterances ; try to get at things from their different points of view.

As a mere literary exercise, this experiment has the advantage of making your style more supple.

Study your character's outlook on life, and you will have discovered the royal road to expressing his thoughts in dialogue.

Another plan to improve your dialogue is to take any short story which lends itself to the purpose, and rewrite it entirely in dialogue, *i.e.*, convert it into a one-act play (which is the dramatic form the short story most closely resembles). Many of O. Henry's stories are suitable for this useful literary exercise. It is not necessary to transform a whole story in this way. Take as many passages as you can and rewrite them in dialogue form. This exercise will improve your writing, and also impart elasticity to your dialogue.

The acid test of dialogue is *Put yourself in his place*. You, as the writer, clearly visualise your characters. Therefore, when writing down their speech you must become each in turn, seeing things from each individual point of view and talking naturally as you would expect them to talk. In a crisis, speech naturally becomes sharp, staccato, sometimes incoherent ; over the walnuts and wine, dialogue is leisurely, more polished.

Don't try to obtain sympathy for your hero and heroine by giving them all the pleasant things to say,

and only putting imprecations and surly abuse in the mouth of your villain. Give him a good case and let him argue it eloquently.

Dialogue is an excellent means of condensation. Instead of writing "Unless you leave the town to-night," *he said with a threatening air*, simply say "Unless you leave the town to-night," *he threatened*. This brings us to the problem of the eternal "he said" and "she said." Avoidance of the perfect tense of the verb "to say" has become almost a fetish. Some writers never use this poor abused verb at all, which I think is a mistake. But there is no doubt that the constant repetition of "he said" and "she said" is deadly monotonous. Substitutes are innumerable: such verbs as :

|           |              |            |
|-----------|--------------|------------|
| asked     | sneered      | acquiesced |
| demanded  | stammered    | declared   |
| blurted   | answered     | gasped     |
| cried     | inquired     | frowned    |
| demurred  | ejaculated   | suggested  |
| faltered  | returned     | wondered   |
| groaned   | uttered      | urged      |
| hesitated | whispered    | nodded     |
| murmured  | breathed     | agreed     |
| put in    | continued    | explained  |
| replied   | went on      | hinted     |
| retorted  | expostulated | laughed    |

will readily occur to the writer. Considerable advantage may be taken also of the additional shades of meaning thus supplied.

The vexed question of dialect deserves some consideration. The golden rule is a negative one—don't attempt the use of any form of dialect with which you are not thoroughly familiar. And even then, be careful not to overdo it. As one critic has said, the short story that requires a glossary will go down to posterity in manuscript form. Life is too short nowadays to unravel the intricacies of an unfamiliar dialect. Some forms, however, are acceptable, but it will be noted that they are usually recognised dialects, *e.g.*, Yorkshire, Cockney, West Country, Irish, Scotch, and even then are carefully diluted to make them thoroughly intelligible to the average reader. It is, incidentally, a waste of effort to try to commit dialect to paper with unswerving fidelity. The thing cannot be done. The best plan is to reproduce as dialect only a few outstanding characteristics of phrase and turns of speech, and write the rest in ordinary English. This will be quite sufficient to give the desired effect.

The reproduction of a foreign idiom can be handled in two ways, either by scattering italicised phrases in the language itself, to give it a flavour as it were ; this, however, should be done with great care ; such phrases as "*n'est-ce pas ?*" "*eh bien,*" "*alors,*" "*tiens,*" etc., seem to have a strange fascination for anyone ignorant of French. They should never be used by anyone uncertain of their exact meaning. Nothing destroys the illusion so quickly as the wrong use or mis-spelling of another language with which the reader may be intimately acquainted. The other and better way, in my opinion, to express foreign construction and idiom is in English words. Leonard Merrick, whose short

stories of the cafés and boulevards of Paris should be read by every young writer, excels in this method of presentation. Here is an illustration from a story by W. B. Maxwell (*A German in the Village.*):

" Battalion headquarters is here, at Emile Veuillot's—that is me, my lieutenant. Your colonel's mess is opposite—at Monsieur Achille Nodier's. You will be well there. It is the best house. Your quartermaster's stores? Go forward. You are at Madame Binet's. Your transport will enter those fields behind the school. Stop not those wagons. Let them go forward down the hill to the first corner. Hold, my captain, one platoon this way, into the barn."

When to use dialogue is the problem that usually confronts the beginner.

Generalisations are useless; it all depends on the circumstances of the story in making. It is, I am sure, largely a matter of instinct with most good writers. Provided that the general principles are understood and that the various purposes of dialogue are borne in mind, it should not be difficult to decide the point. The writer should always bear in mind the three main objects of dialogue:

(1) To reveal character; (2) to convey setting or information; and (3) to accelerate or carry on the action. Very often dialogue may be utilised for more than one purpose at the same time, so urgent is the necessity for compression in the short story.



## CHAPTER VI

### STYLE

MANNERS may make the man, but style does not make an author. It is not of much use being able to say a thing well if one hasn't anything good to say. There is no individuality of style without individuality of thought. So far as the writer of fiction is concerned, style is not nearly so important as people imagine. There are at least a dozen very well known contributors to the magazines who habitually violate the rules of grammar, syntax and many other laws of literary composition. This probably does not arise from ignorance, but from sheer carelessness. It is indefensible, but it is quite true. I mention this, not in order that their example shall be followed (it is scarcely necessary to point out that their work is accepted in spite of such errors), but to show that the literary stylist has no advantage when writing magazine fiction. In fact, I think that a polished style is rather a drawback. It needs living up to. The exquisite prose of Max Beerbohm needs (and fortunately has) a delicate imagination and a fine perception to match. For the rough-and-tumble fiction of the monthly magazines, all that is needed is a vigorous straightforward "story-telling" style.

Style is the expression of the writer's personality in words. Certain authors have the gift of impressing their personality on all they write. The work of Leonard Merrick and Stacy Aumonier has this indefinable gift to a conspicuous degree. That it is a gift cannot be denied. Yet the young writer may profitably study their style and that of many other authors, noting particularly the uncommon use of ordinary words, sentence forms, the use of inversions, the introduction of dialogue, the general spirit of their stories. Many a beginner has thus learned at least one useful trick of the trade, to write "in the grand manner."

Style is, or should be, an unconscious growth. Consciously trying to acquire literary style is fatal. Only by the indirect method of soaking oneself in literature can a pleasing style be developed.

J. Berg. Esenwein, Editor of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (U.S.A.), says :

" 'Reading maketh a full man,' said much-quoted Bacon ; but it depends upon the reader as to what he will be full of—other men's ideas, or a dynamic store of fact and fancy. Writers do not read too much ; they digest too little. A prodigious diet of reading, assimilated into brain and heart, cannot but be of vast assistance in all future creation. But to be the slavish imitator of those whom you read, is the sign-manual of inferiority."

Vocabulary should be increased day by day. Reading—and yet more reading—will accomplish this. A careful study of even only a few good stories will yield rich results. In this connection it is advisable to study the work of only first-class writers.

English is a "woolly" language, and the hundreds of clusters of words which group round one meaning necessitate a nice discrimination in their use. The need for a good dictionary is obvious. A book which I cordially recommend to all aspiring writers is Roget's *Thesaurus* (Longman's, 7s. 6d.). It is an excellent guide to the "right word" and is much more elastic than the ordinary dictionary of synonyms.

Essay writing is valuable for teaching the logical sequence of sentences, and the rhythm of prose. Another good plan to improve the sense of prose rhythm is to read good modern poetry, *e.g.*, Alfred Noyes, Sir William Watson and Rupert Brooke. Perhaps it is this important quality of rhythm that makes certain authors' work so readable. Harsh and unmusical prose—unless used as a deliberate device—jars on the reader, and sometimes breaks the thread of interest altogether. Sentences must be nicely balanced and proportioned in fiction as well as in essays. The only remedy for a student who finds constant difficulty in expressing himself smoothly and fluently is to take a self-instruction course in English composition. He should write as much as possible; write letters, keep a diary, aiming always at acquiring facility of expression. Style will take care of itself.

For the foundation of a good literary style there is no better model in the world than the Bible. Let anyone who doubts the merit of simplicity in writing re-read the stories of the Old Testament and the Parables of the New. They are a revelation of style.

Without any straining after effect, the simple language is not only uniformly beautiful but holds the

reader's attention throughout. Arlo Bates, in *Talks on Writing English*, says of a passage in Marie Corelli's novel *Barabbas* :

" Water having been brought, Pilate, according to Miss Corelli, thus proceeded :

' Slowly lowering his hands he dipped them in the shining bowl, rinsing them over and over again in the clear, cold element, which sparkled in its polished receptacle like an opal against the fire.'

" The Bible finds it possible to say all of this that is necessary in the words :

' Pilate took water, and washed his hands.' "

The Bible is an object lesson in the use of English and the value of compression, and in the short story we have seen that compression is not only desirable but necessary.

Never use two words where one will do. Don't use a long word where a short one is enough. Circumlocution is a deadly sin ; don't write " in an intoxicated condition " when you mean " drunk." Strip your writing of all superfluous words. Study, in addition to the Bible, the stories of Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry and R. L. Stevenson, the three great masters of literary economy. Don't model your style on Henry James, whose work is admired not because his style is involved, but in spite of it.

A. S. M. Hutchinson, describing the evening exodus of girls from City offices, lets himself go as follows :

" They all are wonderful. There is, as out they come, and shining home they go, no man they pass—not all your servants or your laurelled—can of his powers give to weariness what of

their graces these can give; can of his brain or of his hands bequeath mankind what of their these, its mothers foreordained, maintaining it bequeath it. All lovely, all wonderful; and loveliest and wondrous most that one, as often I have seen, who to a lover waiting there emerges, and goes to him and amidst all the thronging crowds, raises her face to him and kisses him, and takes his arm and turns along the crowded streets with him; and lo, no longer crowded, fretful, anxious are that lover's ways, but Paradise."\*

This is the kind of thing to avoid. Only an established "best-seller" may indulge in such verbal fantasy and flourish. In justice to the author of *If Winter Comes*, it must be said that the whimsical theme of the story does justify light and fantastic treatment, but surely not to the extent of the barbarous paragraph above.

Style in fiction should not be as characteristic as, say, handwriting. It must be kept in its proper place, subordinate to the main purpose of "telling a story." The matter of the story deserves more attention than the manner of telling it.

Every writer passes through a period of style-forming influence. Many celebrated authors have freely acknowledged their debt in this respect to the classics. The wisdom of studying the work of classic writers as a preparation for modern journalism is analogous to the now established theory that a study of Latin is the best foundation for a knowledge of English, French and Italian. As a foundation only—not as a model to be imitated. Language is always susceptible to the passing of time and changes of habits.

The young writer who slavishly models his style

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\* From *The Eighth Wonder* (Hodder & Stoughton.)

on even such accomplished stylists as Carlyle, Borrow or Bacon is going to make no headway with magazine editors. This may seem a reflection on magazine editors, but it is their job to supply the public with what they want, and, from a practical point of view, the young writer should recognise this law of supply and demand.

Study must be intelligent, fundamental principles understood and appreciated, and the student may browse through the vast literary fields with incalculable benefit to his own productions. Above all else, his taste should be catholic, and his reading *creative*.

The writer's style should harmonise with the general tone of the story. A whimsical theme demands a delicate touch, a dramatic story is best told in a vigorous style. Slang and colloquialisms are sometimes in keeping with the spirit of the story, and should not be despised. *Clichés*, platitudes and "journalese" should be avoided. Never degenerate into jargon; remember the babu's report of his mother's death, "Regret to inform you the hand that rocked the cradle has kicked the bucket." But a good plain style does not mean a commonplace style. Cultivate an original turn of phrase; coin similes for your own use. Jot down in a notebook any interesting scrap of information that may be turned to literary account. For instance, a writer recently stated that in Turkey old maids are practically unknown. A new simile at once suggests itself for use when required—"As rare as old maids in Turkey."

At the same time, don't allow your work to become over-run with flowers of speech in an effort to avoid the commonplace. In fact, the efforts of many inexperienced

writers would be improved by a drastic weeding-out of flowery phrases.

Writing merely for effect is fatal. Striking turns of phrase, epigrams, witticisms and ingenious metaphors and similes are appreciated at proper intervals and in reasonable quantity. Man cannot live by cake alone. Don't drag in jokes, or worse—puns. A recent magazine story contains this passage :

Under the wall of the chief hotel a group of licensed mendicants thrust maimed limbs into the faces of the passers-by, mouthing their demands of "One pen for bread."

"Listen to 'em," muttered Gardiner. "What d'ye think of a country that allows that sort of thing?"

"That, friend Gardiner," returned Rumens, "is the Madeira whine we've heard so much about."

A good joke, but a bad practice for a story writer. Generally speaking, fiction unadorned with extraneous humour is adorned the most.

Beware, too, of overdoing the use of dots, dashes, commas, asterisks, exclamation marks and other punctuation devices. Nothing is more irritating to a sensitive reader than a plague of dots. To him they represent gaps not in the story, but in the writer's mentality.

Good style does not mean the language of the purist. Split infinitives, the ending of sentences with prepositions, and many other literary peccadilloes which cause the academic-minded to shudder, are honoured in the breach in fiction.

It must not be thought, however, that a good style is to be deprecated. A stylish batsman may make a smaller score in an innings than the unpolished hitter,

but in the long run the positions will be reversed, because the principles of style are sound. The important thing to remember is that style should not be deliberately cultivated. Creative reading is the great secret. The successful author, reviewing his career, usually has to admit that his style, like Topsy, has "grow'd."



## CHAPTER VII

### LOCAL COLOUR AND SOME TYPES OF SHORT STORY

THE greatest mistake an inexperienced writer can make is to choose for a story a setting about which he knows nothing. A clerk living in a suburb is tempting Providence by producing a story of Alaskan snows or the Egyptian desert. The editor who reads the MS. may never have been there either, but editors have an uncanny knack of penetrating inaccuracies in local colour. Omniscience in these matters seems to be a peculiar editorial gift. It is, therefore, sound policy to confine first efforts at short story writing to settings with which one is familiar. There is plenty of interesting material in everyone's life, however commonplace it may appear at first sight.

Jack London once said that any man with a tattoo-mark on the back of his hand or on his forearm was worth following for a romance ; O. Henry asserted that it would be impossible to knock at any house door and say to the first person who appeared : " Fly ! All has been discovered ! " and not get a story.

Romance, pathos, humour, adventure, and tragedy are everywhere. O. Henry found them in the " Four Million " of New York ; Arthur Morrison in the East End of London ; J. B. Priestley in the provinces.

Stories of ordinary, everyday people, suburbs, office life, industry, soldiering, country life, shops, restaurants, railways, schools—all have their market.

At the same time I must admit that many writers have built up a reputation (consolidated by useful cheques) by writing of places and people which are purely the products of imagination, aided probably by a little careful study of books of travel or another writer's stories dealing with the same surroundings. One at least of our popular "Eastern" novelists has only visited Egypt once in her life, and that after her proceeds from successful Egyptian novels enabled her to do so. The comment is not intended to be disparaging; in fact, I think all the more credit is due to the writer in question. Imagination is a wonderful gift, and it varies in an amazing degree. By dint of imagination some writers can produce stories of remote climes which are convincing in their realism. But this gift of just striking the right note belongs to a small minority, and, generally speaking, young writers should avoid what is a dangerous practice.

At the same time realism does not necessarily imply literal accuracy.\* The Rhodesian novels of the late Gertrude Page are extraordinarily realistic, but with all respect to the memory of this gifted author, no one who has lived in modern Rhodesia would accept her books as faithful presentations of Rhodesian life and conditions.

It is usually enough to make a special study of a place or of certain types of people. It is not necessary

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\* See page 30

to have actually lived in the locality or to have been on intimate terms with the people you are going to use as material for a story.

In this respect enterprise gets its own reward. In fiction, as in most walks of life, specialisation pays.

A young writer came to me not long ago with an idea for a story. The plot hinged on a famous oil painting. He explained that it was necessary to the story to describe the inspection of the picture by a group of art critics. Unfortunately, he hadn't the slightest idea how to put this down on paper. Like the famous old lady, he didn't know much about art. Where the technical side was concerned he readily admitted he was out of his depth. I advised him to turn up certain newspaper files of the last Royal Academy and to consult the critics' articles which always appear at considerable length at that time of the year. He took the advice and easily gleaned enough material to make his critics' remarks seem true to life.

It cannot be over-emphasised, that this "seeming true to life" is the goal to be aimed at. Not real life as it is, but as it is popularly supposed to be. W. W. Jacobs' sailormen are not real sailors, but better still, they are what the public imagine them to be. There is all the difference in the world between what is *convincing* in fiction and what is true.

One popular novelist is at present specialising in hunting stories. So cleverly is the local colour painted in that few people suspect that the writer's personal experience of hunting is very limited, and that all the picturesque phraseology and technical detail of the hunt were supplied by another writer! What does it matter?

The stories entertain and the hunting atmosphere seems true to life.

The problem of what to write about is, of course, nearly always solved by the plot. Once the plot has crystallised into being, the setting of the story is decided as a matter of course. But not always. For instance, a war story plot—still unpopular with editors five years\* after the Great War!—must be adapted to another setting :

A child about eleven years old adores her father. The Great War takes him away and she dimly realises what war means. Without him she is desperately lonely. The doll which he gave her is her sole companion. Presently he is invalided home with gas poisoning and she sees him die in agony. An intense hatred for the Germans who killed him takes possession of her. Grief-stricken, she turns to her beloved doll for consolation. One day, combing her doll's hair, she finds the words "Made in Germany." It dawns on her that the doll may have been—was—made by the German who killed her Daddy. That night she is found lying by the side of the shattered doll.

This plot would probably be marketable if remoulded on different lines. A Serbian doll-maker, the little daughter of a Bulgarian peasant, his death at the hands of a Serbian raiding party, and her sacrifice of the cherished doll—something on these lines would undoubtedly make the plot more acceptable under current conditions.

Stories in which character predominates need careful handling of "local colour." In such stories the reader travels at a more leisurely pace, is more critical of detail. But do not imagine that, having described the background of a story, you can go ahead with your mind at

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\*This was written in 1923.

rest so far as local colour is concerned. Fictional pictures are not created by a clumsy daub, and then—finish. The scene must be built up carefully and subtly. You may, of course, begin with a paragraph of scenic description ; but be careful not to overdo it. And this does not absolve you from the subsequent building-up process.

Two great principles, apparently in direct opposition to each other, govern the construction of a short story ; on the one hand a rigid condensation to the skeleton of the action, and on the other the insertion of numerous scraps of matter to create atmosphere, character, and generally to achieve conviction. The clever balancing of these two opposed principles is craftsmanship. To the reader action and atmosphere must appear inseparable, each dependent on the other for its effect.

Here are a few instances to show how local colour is deftly woven into the body of the story :

" Bud gazed impartially at the water-jar hanging on the gallery and chewed a mesquite leaf. For miles they had ridden in silence save for the soft drum of the ponies' hoofs on the matted mesquite grass. . . ."—O. HENRY.

" Why, he said to himself as he walked out into the nightly crowd of Chinese, Indians, Burmans, buffalo carts, rickshaws, gharries, motor-cars, all seething through the wide, white-lighted streets of Rangoon—why should he not manage to get the treasure after all ? "—BEATRICE GRIMSHAW.

" He was sitting at a paper-strewn table in his library, a decorous library, a gentleman's library, lined from floor to ceiling with bookcases filled with books that no gentleman's library should be without, and trying to solve the eternal problem why two and two should not make forty, when the butler entered announcing the doctor."—W. J. LOCKE.

" Beddington, wading knee-deep in the scrub . . . And now as he lay on the flower-starred turf, his back against the

sun-warmed rock, he grew increasingly confident that this humble expedition was destined to serve its purpose with equal success."—LUCAS MALET.

Observe with what seemingly careless skill the local colour is touched in. These random examples may be indefinitely multiplied by the student's own reading. The lesson is plain; local colour is most effectively pictured by being skilfully sandwiched in the body of the story. After all, local colour is only a minor theme and should be treated accordingly.

The five senses—sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell—are the means by which the writer obtains atmosphere. Of these, sight and hearing are the most widely used, but the others should not be overlooked. Smell, for instance, is very suggestive. The fragrance of the wood, the salt sea breeze, the acrid smell of gunpowder, the appetising smell of cooking bacon, the aroma of burning tobacco—all these may be pressed into service with excellent results. Atmosphere may by this means be conveyed in that subtle, indirect way which is the essence of craftsmanship. It is unnecessary, for instance, to interrupt the action of the story to state directly that "The sea breeze blew in his face." Why not, "Jimmy, sniffing the sea breeze, made his way . . ." etc. ?

Note how the effects are obtained in the following colourful passage from a short story by John Russell.\*

Henry of Vitongo was a born pagan. . . . He loved the equal days and the long, long moonlit nights that pass to merriment and choric song, the droning organ of the reef and the cymballing of the palm-fronds. He loved every impact that set

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\* *The Pagan (In Dark Places)*, (Butterworth).

him in his ordained environment—the salted lash of spray, driving wind, and rain like hammers from the sky; the breath-taking, bubble-poised send of a frail canoe; the cleaving triumph of a deep-sea dive; saffron dawns and cool purple dusks and quivering fierce noons on a coral shore.”

The main object of local colour, setting and atmosphere is to create a realistic picture for the benefit of the reader. It is occasionally necessary to exaggerate a little in order to achieve a realistic effect, but this legitimate device must not be confused with inaccuracy of detail. Absurd mistakes about the habits of animals and birds, wrong seasonal appearances of plants and flowers, are points which provide a lusty weapon for the critic. Legal technicalities, historical detail, facts and figures generally, must be handled with great care. Don't, as Dickens did, make a character (Lady Deadlock) walk from Berkeley Square to St. Albans in about two hours.

The golden rule is “verify your references.” Until you are sure of your ground, don't put anything of this nature into your story. Carefully check the passing of time. The old-time stage clock, which recorded the passing of half an hour while the actors spoke but a few sentences, is not to be imitated.

Don't send your characters a 100-mile journey by motor car and bring them to their destination in half an hour. Such mistakes are easily made, and to obviate them many writers make a practice of preparing for their own information maps of the locality, plans of the house, and so on. Anyone who cannot visualise a scene clearly should adopt this method.

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Intelligent study of the magazines month by month

will reveal what kinds of story are in favour with editors. Not long ago, for instance, there was a notable boom in psychic stories, not quite on the lines of the old ghost story, but with a modern dash of the supernatural. Certain types of story are always in demand : detective and mystery stories ; adventure stories ; sporting stories ; and, of course, love stories.

I have noticed among the earliest efforts of many writers a marked tendency towards the morbid or gruesome. Why this should be so I do not know, but it is bad policy. The normal editor prefers " happy " stuff. The gruesome short story, however, is a fairly common product. Its stage cousin, the Grand Guignol, made a valiant effort to establish itself in the affections of playgoers, but I fear that it will never appeal to more than a minority. Most people like their theatres and fiction to be bright and happy, in contrast to the deadly monotony of their daily lives.

Ambrose Bierce is probably responsible for the literary school that favours the gruesome short story ; but the modern product differs considerably from the Ambrose Bierce stories, which are now " dated."

Of the modern occult and uncanny stories, perhaps the best authors to study are Algernon Blackwood, May Sinclair, E. F. Benson, who at one time was specialising in " spook " stories and, of course, H. G. Wells. Stories with a touch of the supernatural have had a continuous vogue since Poe published his *Ligeia*. One of the best of this kind is W. B. Maxwell's *The Short Cut* (included in *The Great Interruption*, Hutchinson, 2s.). *The Ancient Sin*, by Michael Arlen (*These Charming People*, Collins, 3s. 6d.) is a typically modern product on these lines.



Atmosphere is all-important in this type of story, and it requires an exceedingly delicate touch to impart it with success. On this account, it is a type of story which the inexperienced writer is not advised to tackle.

Love stories are always popular. The feminine element preponderates in the magazine public, and editors are always on the look-out for good romantic stories. This type of story is the pastry of fiction and needs a light and clever touch. Writers, whose strong point is dialogue, will find this a profitable form. Characterisation is important, too, for the reader subconsciously insists upon well-delineated portraits in a story in which human interest runs so high. The physical appearance of the characters must be firmly established, perhaps because the intellectual standard of the public that likes love stories is not very high. The stories of Berta Ruck (whose work is on a much higher literary level than many people suppose), Owen Oliver, Christine Joep-Slade, Muriel Hine, Dorothy Black, W. L. George, A. M. Burrage, May Christie, Denis Mackail, May Edginton, F. E. Baily, Pamela Frankau and Warwick Deeping provide an excellent index to modern requirements.

Character studies are in a class apart. By this I mean stories which are not really stories in the strict sense of the word, but exclusively pen-pictures. They occasionally find their way into the better magazines, but usually with some slight stirring of action to keep the reader's interest alive. In Stacy Aumonier's *The Funny Man's Day*, which is a pathetic study of a professional comedian there is this subdued action movement. A story may be primarily a study of character, yet contain a definite plot interest. Compare Leonard

Merrick's *The Portrait of a Coward* (see page 103) and *Ole Fags* by Stacy Aumonier.\* But a vignette of character, although fiction, is not properly a story, but a sketch. *Odd Fish*, by Stacy Aumonier (illustrated by George Belcher),† is a collection of such pen-portraits.

Of all modern authors Stacy Aumonier is the ideal model for the portrayal of character. With a delicate, whimsical, shrewdly humorous touch, he depicted an astonishing variety of types. Other authors, whose short stories are worth reading for their light on human character are John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton (in the few short stories he has written), Hugh Walpole, E. M. Delafield, Frank Swinnerton, Max Beerbohm, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, and Frank Norris.

Detective and mystery stories demand a high degree of constructional skill. The plot is the main feature. The whole art of writing mystery stories centres in the ingenious contrivance of the *dénouement*. The more wildly improbable and perplexing the story, the more skill is required in revealing the explanation and making it convincing. The story must "march," and carry the reader's interest without faltering from start to finish. Read the ingenious stories of Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, R. Austin Freeman, the *Bulldog Drummond* stories of "Sapper," and, of course, the classic Sherlock Holmes series by the late Sir A. Conan Doyle.

Humorous stories are rare. Anyone who can produce a really funny story—the kind of story that will make the reader laugh aloud—will find editors beaming with friendship. A sense of humour is such an elusive and

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\* *Miss Bracegirdle and Others* (Hutchinson.)

† (Heinemann.)

variable quantity that it is very difficult to know how to cater for it ; but if you succeed in alighting on a means of producing laughter-provoking fiction, your chief worry will be income tax. There are two kinds of humorous stories : those which depend for their effect on an ingenious play on words or phrases, riotous burlesque, parody, or satire ; and those of which the theme and plot are rich in mirth-provoking situations and incidents. Of the two the latter is the rarer bird. Stephen Leacock excels in boisterous fun ; " Beachcomber " (J. B. Morton), of the *Daily Express*, is a humorist of rare quality ; K. R. G. Browne and F. W. Thomas are well known in contemporary journalism for verbal quips and ingenuity of phrase. Of all English humorists pride of place must be given to W. W. Jacobs, whose night watchman and Bob Pretty stories have a strong hold on the affections of the reading public. His muse has been sadly silent of late. P. G. Wodehouse has attained wide popularity by the creation of several humorous types, notably Jeeves, the discreet and resourceful butler ; Keble Howard, A. Neil Lyons, Pett Ridge, " Saki " (H. H. Monro), late Barry Pain, Edgar and Selwyn Jepson, Denis Mackail with his exploits of " Gibson," and the late Herbert Jenkins with his Bindle stories, are all well known to the magazine public. The creation of a humorous *type* seems to be the royal road to popular favour. But the demand for good humorous stuff far exceeds the supply.

Sea stories have a wide market. An intimate knowledge of seafaring folk and ways is, of course, a first essential. This is a useful asset, for the vogue of sea stories appears to be permanent. To the stay-at-home

citizen a story with a tang of the salt sea is a tonic. Writers who have built up a reputation for this type of story include Jack London, Frank Bullen, "Bartimeus," Captain Frank H. Shaw, Boyd Cable, Bill Adams, and "Taffrail." Here, again, local colour is important. Tales of India, the tropics, and the South Seas have a big following. Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Russell, Beatrice Grimshaw, Somerset Maugham, Edmund Snell and H. de Vere Stacpoole have specialised in this branch with marked success. Nature stories are a regular feature of many magazines, and now that F. St. Mars is dead, there seems to be no one but H. Mortimer Batten, Charles G. D. Roberts and W. R. Calvert to carry on the good work.

The Irish yarns of George A. Birmingham and Dorothea Conyers; the Jewish-American stories of Bruno Lessing; tales of Chinatown by Thomas Burke, Elinor Mordaunt, and Frank Norris; stories of Africa by Gertrude Page and F. A. M. Webster; the fantastic Chinese creations of Sax Rohmer; and the historical romances of Rafael Sabatini and Marjorie Bowen—to all of these the young writer will turn in his search for good examples of local colour. The next best thing to personal experience is the study of local colour and atmosphere in the pages of other authors.

The "bread and butter" story deserves mention. A prodigious quantity of cheap fiction is published every week, destined for consumption by schoolboys, errand boys, servant girls, factory girls—in short, the multitude. Most of it serves but one purpose, entertainment. Most of the good people who regard ~~this~~ output with contempt seem to have an idea that it is pernicious trash.

It is nothing of the kind. It may not attain a high standard—it doesn't—but it is what the public want, and on the whole it is wholesome, if not elevating. This vast market is often overlooked by the aspiring writer. Anyone with sufficient imagination and energy ought to be able to turn out this "bread and butter" fiction. Its requirements are quite simple, and the pattern is readily obtainable at the small newsagents' shop round the corner. This type of fiction has well-defined limitations as regard theme and plot, but provided you stick to the same kind of plot and characters you will be on the right lines. Don't be afraid to imitate; the public is a conservative one and likes to know what to expect. The stories run to 15,000 words in length, and the average rate of payment is only a guinea a thousand; but as no literary polish is required, merely a story with plenty of thrill and incident in it, it does not involve a heavy mental outlay on the part of the author. "Juvenile" stories are always in great demand. Love stories are even more popular.

Once a foothold is secured in this market, editors will often commission stories on synopsis; a summary of the plot and perhaps the first two or three chapters. To anyone with a fertile imagination and a ready pen, this market presents lucrative possibilities. Many writers earn substantial incomes from what is generally regarded as "bread and butter" fiction.

To return to the magazines, the young writer who relies on the plot-interest of his stories is, perhaps, pursuing the wisest course. The magazines of to-day are filled with stories which are practically nothing but action from start to finish. Perhaps this is due to the

influence of the cinema, or of the American short story. Whatever the reason, stories with plenty of excitement and incident undoubtedly appeal to editors. Certain familiar types of story are nothing but action stories. The problem of local colour is reduced to a minimum, but should never be entirely neglected. All short stories require a certain amount of colouring to be convincing. And if there is one reason more than another why MSS. are rejected, it is because they are unconvincing.

The title of your story is a nice problem. It is almost a platitude to say that a good story deserves a good title. If the original inspiration of the story happens to have suggested the title at the same time, well and good. But frequently the writer has to puzzle his brains for an appropriate title after the story is finished. The best advice I can give the young writer is this—DON'T be satisfied with a *fairly good* title. Mediocrity is fatal. Nearly always there is just one title that will fit perfectly. Search diligently for that happy inspiration. Examine the story from every possible angle. When at last the title frames itself in your mind, you will say at once, "That's it!" The happy title is always worth hunting for.

The majority of short-story titles express human interest. A glance at a random collection of stories will confirm this. Good titles always make a positive contribution to the story even if they only act as a kind of literary cement. And the main purpose of the title should not be overlooked: it is to label the story for the reader's benefit. It should be a hallmark of the story's quality. A humorous story should have an appropriate witty title, a story in the grand manner must have a serious, dignified title, and so on.

## COMPLETE WRITING FOR PROFIT

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ce of the cinema, or of the American short story. Over the reason, stories with plenty of excitement and incident undoubtedly appeal to editors. Certain types of story are nothing but action stories. The problem of local colour is reduced to a minimum, and should never be entirely neglected. All short stories need a certain amount of colouring to be convincing. For there is one reason more than another why MSS. are rejected, it is because they are unconvincing.

The title of your story is a nice problem. It is almost idle to say that a good story deserves a good title. The original inspiration of the story happens to have suggested the title at the same time, well and good. But usually the writer has to puzzle his brains for an adequate title after the story is finished. The best advice I can give the young writer is this—DON'T be satisfied with a *fairly good* title. Mediocrity is fatal. Someway there is just one title that will fit perfectly. Hunt diligently for that happy inspiration. Examine the title from every possible angle. When at last the title comes itself in your mind, you will say at once, "That's it!" The happy title is always worth hunting for. The majority of short-story titles express human emotion. A glance at a random collection of stories will confirm this. Good titles always make a positive contribution to the story even if they only act as a kind of reinforcement. And the main purpose of the title should not be overlooked: it is to label the story for the reader's benefit. It should be a hallmark of the story's character. A humorous story should have an appropriate



It is nothing of the kind. It may not attain a high standard—it doesn't—but it is what the public want, and on the whole it is wholesome, if not elevating. This vast market is often overlooked by the aspiring writer. Anyone with sufficient imagination and energy ought to be able to turn out this "bread and butter" fiction. Its requirements are quite simple, and the pattern is readily obtainable at the small newsagents' shop round the corner. This type of fiction has well-defined limitations as regard theme and plot, but provided you stick to the same kind of plot and characters you will be on the right lines. Don't be afraid to imitate; the public is a conservative one and likes to know what to expect. The stories run to 15,000 words in length, and the average rate of payment is only a guinea a thousand; but as no literary polish is required, merely a story with plenty of thrill and incident in it, it does not involve a heavy mental outlay on the part of the author. "Juvenile" stories are always in great demand. Love stories are even more popular.

Once a foothold is secured in this market, editors will often commission stories on synopsis; a summary of the plot and perhaps the first two or three chapters. To anyone with a fertile imagination and a ready pen, this market presents lucrative possibilities. Many writers earn substantial incomes from what is generally regarded as "bread and butter" fiction.

To return to the magazines, the young writer who relies on the plot-interest of his stories is, perhaps, pursuing the wisest course. The magazines of to-day are filled with stories which are practically nothing but action from start to finish. Perhaps this is due to the

influence of the cinema, or of the American short story. Whatever the reason, stories with plenty of excitement and incident undoubtedly appeal to editors. Certain familiar types of story are nothing but action stories. The problem of local colour is reduced to a minimum, but should never be entirely neglected. All short stories require a certain amount of colouring to be convincing. And if there is one reason more than another why MSS. are rejected, it is because they are unconvincing.

The title of your story is a nice problem. It is almost a platitude to say that a good story deserves a good title. If the original inspiration of the story happens to have suggested the title at the same time, well and good. But frequently the writer has to puzzle his brains for an appropriate title after the story is finished. The best advice I can give the young writer is this—DON'T be satisfied with a *fairly good* title. Mediocrity is fatal. Nearly always there is just one title that will fit perfectly. Search diligently for that happy inspiration. Examine the story from every possible angle. When at last the title frames itself in your mind, you will say at once, "That's it!" The happy title is always worth hunting for.

The majority of short-story titles express human interest. A glance at a random collection of stories will confirm this. Good titles always make a positive contribution to the story even if they only act as a kind of literary cement. And the main purpose of the title should not be overlooked: it is to label the story for the reader's benefit. It should be a hallmark of the story's quality. A humorous story should have an appropriate witty title, a story in the grand manner must have a serious, dignified title, and so on.

The title frequently affords an opportunity for humour, a play upon words, alliteration, and other entertaining devices. Titles like *The Widow's Cruise*, *An Arabian Knight*, *The Pimiento Pancakes*, *How to be Happy though Married*, *Ladies in Lavender*, are cases in point. As a rule titles should be short, and concrete rather than abstract.

The acid test of a title's merit is its applicability to the general scheme or tone of the story. The student should pass judgment on the titles of all the short stories he reads, and in so doing will be gradually formulating for his own benefit the requirements of a good title. Occasionally he will meet with a title that is a flash of genius, like H. de Vere Stacpoole's title, *Did Kressler Kill his Wife?*\* which cannot be appreciated until the reader reaches the very last line of the story.

IN *Men, Women and Beasts*. (Hutchinson.)

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SHORT STORY. ANALYSED

THE analysis of good short stories, on the lines of the specimen which follows, is an invaluable exercise to enable the student to appreciate the importance of the architecture of a short story. Every story worth studying should be read twice : the first time in order to test its appeal to one's personal palate ; and the second, with a critical, analytical eye, in order to master for oneself the use of those established literary devices which produce certain stock effects. *Cap'en Jollyfax's Gun* should be read first as a story, secondly in conjunction with the marginal notes. A dozen stories dissected in this manner, for one's private benefit, will yield rich results. Particularly will valuable light be thrown on constructional devices, such as "key sentences." A word of warning is necessary to the young writer who makes use of this exercise ; remember, that very often an important effect is obtained not by what is put into

#### CAP'EN JOLLYFAX'S GUN \*

By ARTHUR MORRISON.

The fame of Cap'en Jollyfax's gun spread  
wide over Thames mouth and the coasts

*Period and setting.*

*Effective direct*

---

\* Included in *Green Ginger* (Hutchinson.)

*description.* thereabout, in the years before and after the middle of the nineteenth century. The gun was no such important thing to look at, being a little brass cannon short of a yard long, standing in a neat little circle of crushed cockle-shell, with a border of nicely-matched flints, by the side of Cap'en Jollyfax's white flagstaff, before Cap'en Jollyfax's blue front door, on the green ridge that backed the marshes and overlooked the sea. But, 'small as Cap'en Jollyfax's gun might be to look at, it was most amazingly large to hear; perhaps not so deep and thunderous as loud and angry, with a ringing bang that seemed to tear the ear drums.

*Keysentence "A."*  
*(See "B" later.)*  
*Information preparing the reader for the main plot incident.*

Cap'en Jollyfax fired the gun at midnight on Christmas Eve, to start the carollers. Again he fired it at midnight between the old year and the new, to welcome the year; on the ninth of January, because that was the anniversary of Nelson's funeral, and on the twenty-eighth, because that was the date of the battle of Aliwal, then a recent victory. He fired it on the Queen's birthday, on Waterloo Day, Trafalgar Day, St. Clement's Day—for Clement was the parish saint—and on the anniversary of the battle of the Nile; and on the fifth of November he fired it at intervals all day long, and as fast as he could clean and load it after dark. He also fired it on his own birthday, on Roboshobery Dove's, Sam Prentice's, old Tom Blyth's, and any other casual birthday he might hear of. He fired it in commemoration of every victory reported during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, he fired it to celebrate all weddings, some christenings, and once when they hanged a man at Springfield gaol.

*Note "weaving in" of minor characters.*

*A note of humour in the final sentence of the paragraph.*

*Character.*

Cap'en Jollyfax was a retired master mariner of lusty girth and wide, brilliant countenance.

In the intervals between the discharges of his gun, he painted his cottage, his flagstaff, his garden fence and gate, and any other thing that was his on which paint would stay, except the gun, which he kept neatly scoured and polished.

He painted the flagstaff white, the fence green, and the cottage in several colours; and the abiding mystery of Cap'en Jollyfax's establishment was what ultimately became of the paint. For a new coat succeeded the last very soon after the surface was sufficiently dry, and the consumption of paint was vast; and yet the flagstaff never seemed to grow much thicker, nor did the fence, as a reasonable person would expect, develop into a continuous wall of paint, supported within by a timber skeleton.

Cap'en Jollyfax was a popular man on the whole, though perhaps more particularly so with boys, because of his gun. They would congregate about the fence to watch him clean it and load it, and the happiest of all boys was the one who chanced to be nearest when it was fired, and whose ear was loudest assailed by the rending bang that was so delightful to every boy's senses. Boys dreamed at night of some impossible adventure by the issue whereof the happy dreamer was accorded the reward of permission to fire Cap'en Jollyfax's gun; and one boy at least formed a dark project of hoarding pennies, buying powder, escaping by perilous descent from his bedroom window, and firing Cap'en Jollyfax's gun lawlessly in the depth of night.

But if the gun enhanced Cap'en Jollyfax's popularity among the boys, its tendency was otherway with the women—those in particular who lived near enough to be startled by its noise. The natural feminine distrust of all

*Suggestion of indefatigable industry.*

*Further suggestion of character, with humorous development.*

*Key paragraph "C." (See "D" later.)*

*Developing incident.*

*Foundation or main crisis.*

*Introduction  
of leading  
character.*

*Note skilful  
"weaving in."*

*Preparation  
for main crisis.*

*First minor  
crisis and plot  
incident.*

*Life-simulating  
description.*

*Beginning of  
suspense.*

*Note the  
human touch  
here.*

guns in all circumstances was increased in the case of a brass cannon, which might go off at any moment of Cap'en Jollyfax's crowded calendar. And it was asserted that Mrs. Billing, the widow, who lived at the hill-foot, exactly under Cap'en Jollyfax's line of fire, had been startled into the destruction of three basins and a large dish within one month of many birth-days. Mrs. Billing indeed, as was to be expected from her situation, was the brass gun's chief enemy. Consequently if Cap'en Jollyfax had dragged his gun up the aisle of Leigh Church and fired it under the pulpit, he could scarcely have startled the parishioners more than did the rector when he first read the banns of marriage between John Jollyfax, bachelor, and Mary Ann Billing, widow, both of that parish.

Except for the gun, there need have been little to startle Leigh, for Cap'en Jollyfax was none so old, as retired skippers went thereabouts, and Mrs. Billing was as neat and pleasant a widow of forty-two as might be found in Essex, where the widows have always been admirable. Moreover, she had no incumbrance in the way of children.

But there was no mistaking the fact now, even for the deaf who were not at church. For the succeeding fortnight and a day or two over, Cap'en Jollyfax and Mrs. Billing were visible, day by day, and arm-in-arm from shop to shop, in Leigh High Street. The result was no great advance in the retail commerce of Leigh—in fact, none. The household appointments of both Cap'en Jollyfax and Mrs. Billing were fairly complete in their humble way; and when Mrs. Billing had triumphantly hauled Cap'en Jollyfax into an ironmonger's in pursuit of a certain fish-kettle or a particular

fender, she was certain presently to discover that just such an article embellished Cap'en Jollyfax's kitchen, or her own. Nevertheless, she persevered, for a bout of shopping was the proper preliminary to any respectable wedding, and must be performed with full pomp and circumstance; and if nothing, or very little, was actually bought, so much the cheaper. Mrs. Billing was resolved to be baulked of no single circumstance of distinction and triumph appertaining to the occasion. And Cap'en Jollyfax was mightily relieved to find so much shopping cost so little after all; so that he grew gradually more cheerful as the wedding day neared, which is said not to be invariably the case in these circumstances.

*Local colour.*

*Sly humour.*

The wedding was fixed for the morning of a certain Wednesday, and on the evening before the day, Mrs. Billing spent some little time in glorious authority on Cap'en Jollyfax's premises superintending the labour of Mrs. Packwood, who did charring, and was now employed to make the domestic arrangements of the place suit the 'ancies of its coming mistress. Flushed with hours of undisputed command, Mrs. Billing emerged in the little garden, whereunto Cap'en Jollyfax had retreated early in the operations; and there perceived to-morrow's bridegroom in the act of withdrawing a broomstick from the mouth of the brass gun.

*"in glorious authority"—  
note original  
turn of phrase.*

*Plot incident.*

"What ha' you been a-doing to that gun, John?" demanded Mrs. Billing, rather peremptorily, eyeing the weapon askant.

*Character.*

"A-giving her a rub up inside an' out," answered Cap'en Jollyfax placably. "An' I've just rammed her with a good big charge ready for to-morrow."

*Note compression in the adverb "placably." Note the dialogue struggle for*

"Why for to-morrow?" Mrs. Billing's voice was a trifle sharper still, and she turned a



*m a s t e r y*, fresh glance of unmistakable dislike on arousing the the gun.

*reader's interest.* (The late introduction of dialogue indicates the opening of the main action.) "Why for to-morrow?" Cap'en Jollyfax repeated wonderingly. "Why weddin' day, o course. Touch her off when we come home from church."

*Beginning of main crisis.* "Nothin' o' the sort." She spoke now with a positive snap. "A nasty dangerous banging thing as frightens people out o' their seven senses. I won't hev it. Why, 'twere almost more'n I could stand down there at the bottom o' the hill, an' hev that thing go off near me I will not, so there."

*"B." (See Key sentence "A.")* Cap'en Jollyfax stared blankly. "What!" he jerked out, scarce believing his ears. "not fire the gun on the weddin' day?"

*Note restraint in use of dialogue.* "No," Mrs. Billing replied emphatically, "nor any other day, neither. Folk'ud think you were a little boy, a-playing with sich toys; an' I can't abear to be near the thing."

*C h a r a c t e r (obstinacy.)*

The staring wonder faded gradually from Cap'en Jollyfax's face, and a certain extra redness succeeded it. "I be goin' to fire my own gun on my weddin' day," he said firmly.

"You ben't nothin' o' the sort," rejoined the widow, no less firmly: "not on my weddin' day. Nayther then nor after, if I'm your wife. Just you take the charge out o' that gun."

*Developing incident.*

Cap'en Jollyfax shook his head, with something like triumph in his eye. "Won't come out 'cept you fire it," he said. "That's the onny way."

"Very well then, fire it now—not now, but as soon as I be gone. Fire off your gun for the last time to-night, and be done with such foolishness."

"Ben't nothin' to fire it for to-day," the old sailor returned shortly. "This gun's my department, an' I'm goin' to 'tend to it. I'm

goin' to put the tarpaulin over it now, an' to-morrow, Polly, when we're back from church, I'm goin' to fire it."

*Character again.*

Mrs. Billing bridled. "You're a-goin' to fire that gun before I go to church with 'ee, John Jollyfax, an' not load it agin nayther."

"I'm a-goin' to fire this gun when we're back from church, an' afterwards when proper."

"Cap'en Jollyfax, I ben't goin' to church with 'ee till after that gun be fired. So now you know. If you don't fire it to-night you must fire it to-morrow before I turn a step toward church. That's my word on it."

"I'm a-goin' to fire my gun when I like," growled Cap'en Jollyfax, dogged and sulky.

"Very well," replied the widow, tossing her head and turning away, "then if you want me to wed 'ee, an' when you want me to wed 'ee, you'll fire it first. Then, maybe, I'll consider of it. But no wife o' yours I'll be till that powder be fired off. An' so good evenin' to 'ee, Cap'en Jollyfax."

*End of main crisis.*

That was the beginning of a period of vast interest and excitement in Leigh and its neighbourhood. Cap'en Jollyfax's gun remained silent all that night, nor was it fired in the morning.

*Suspense*

What Mrs. Billing's feelings were in the matter, whether she sat anxiously listening for the sound of the gun, as some averred, or dismissed the whole subject from her mind, as her subsequent conversation with Mrs. Peck suggested, are secrets I cannot pretend to have penetrated. Cap'en Jollyfax, on his part, consulted deeply in the morning with Roboshobery Dove, and evolved a scheme of strategy suited to the physical features of the place. Cap'en Jollyfax, in his best blue coat with brass buttons and his very shiniest hard glazed hat,

*Plot incident.*

*Note "telescope"—not field-glasses.*

*Character.*

*Dialogue "in character" (nautical).*

*Admirable compression here, "who . . . opposite party."*

*Intensifies main crisis.*

*Plot incident.*

approached the churchyard and took his seat, in a non-committal sort of way, on the low stone wall that bounded it, with his back toward the church. Roboshobery Dove crouched behind a corner of the same wall, vastly inconvenienced by his wooden leg, but steadily directing his telescope downhill, so that it bore exactly on the door of Mrs. Billing's cottage. It was Roboshobery's duty, as look-out man, to report instantly if Mrs. Billing were seen emerging from the door with her best bonnet on, in which event Cap'en Jollyfax would at once leave the wall and take up his position at the church door to receive her. Failing that, Cap'en Jollyfax would be spared the ignominy of waiting at the church for a bride who never came.

At intervals Cap'en Jollyfax took his pipe from his mouth and roared: "Look-out, ahoy!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the unvarying reply.

"Hev'ee sighted?"

"Nothin' but the door!"

Whereat the watch would resume for ten minutes more.

It was three-quarters of an hour past the time fixed, when the rector, himself very punctual, came angrily to the church door, surveyed the small crowd which had gathered, and became aware of Cap'en Jollyfax's strategy.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded of Mrs. Peck, who, in fact, was spying in the interests of the opposite party. "Where's Mrs. Billing?"

"Mrs. Billing, sir, she say she'll never think o' comin' till Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun."

The rector stared at Mrs. Peck for fifteen seconds, passed his fingers once backward and once forward through his hair, and then without a word retired to the vestry.

Roboshobery Dove maintained his watch,

and the little crowd waited patiently till the shadow of the dial over the church porch lay well past twelve o'clock, and the legal time for a wedding was over. Then Cap'en Jollyfax hauled out his silver watch and roared, though Roboshobery Dove was scarce a dozen yards off :

" Look-out, ahoy ! "

" Aye, aye, sir ! "

" Eight bells."

With that, Roboshobery Dove hauled out his own watch, banged it, as usual, on the socket of his wooden leg, clapped it against his ear, and then held it before his eyes. Finally, having restored the watch to his breeches-pocket, he shut the telescope, stood erect and rejoined his principal; and the two old sailors stumped off solemnly toward Cap'en Jollyfax's cottage. All that day Cap'en Jollyfax's gun remained silent, and all the next. The day after that was June the first, on which date Cap'en Jollyfax had been wont to fire the gun in celebration of Howe's victory. But this time the Glorious First went unhonoured, and it was perceived that Cap'en Jollyfax was mighty stubborn. Monday, the fourth, was Sam Prentice's birthday, but Cap'en Jollyfax's gun stood dumb still.

Leigh had never before listened so eagerly for a bang as it listened now for the report that should publish the submission of Cap'en Jollyfax; but still the report did not come. People took sides, and bets were made. It was observed that Cap'en Jollyfax was grown peevish and morose, that he shunned his friends and moped at home.

Mrs. Billing, on the other hand, went abroad as always, gay and smiling as ever. Cap'en Jollyfax might do as he pleased, said Mrs. Billing, but she wasn't going to marry him while the charge remained in that gun. If he chose to fire it out

*Plot incident.*

*Plot incident.*

*Note compression " should publish . . . Cap'en Jollyfax."*

*Character suggested.*

*Summarising main crisis.*

*Feminine touch.*

*Action continues.*

*Neat disposal of a point which would occur to an intelligent reader.*

*To camouflage climax : a legitimate device to put the reader off the scent.*

*Suspense.*

*Action accelerated.*

*Plot incident and third (minor) crisis.*

*Short sentences expressive of excitement.*

*Emphasis.*

—well, she might think the matter over again, but she was none so sure of even that, now.

The days went on, and Cap'en Jollyfax's friends grew concerned for him. He was obstinate enough, but brooding it was plain. Roboshobery Dove, with much ingenuity, sought to convince him that by persisting in his determination he was defeating himself, since there was now an end of gun-fire altogether. Cap'en Jollyfax thought a little over that aspect of the case, but did not fire the gun. It was thought, however, that he could scarce hold out much longer. He was said to have been seen one afternoon stealthily rubbing over the gun and renewing the prime

A fortnight went, and with June the eighteenth everybody expected to see an end of the business ; for in truth, Waterloo Day would have made the best excuse of the year. But for the first time since Cap'en Jollyfax came to the cottage, Waterloo Day passed unsaluted. People wondered and shook their heads ; surely it couldn't last much longer ?

And indeed it did not. There was another silent day, and then in the dead of night of the nineteenth, Leigh was startled once more by the bang of Cap'en Jollyfax's gun. Louder and sharper than ever it rang in the still of the night, and folk jumped upright in their beds at the shock.

Heads pushed out from latticed casements in Leigh High Street, and conversation passed between opposite gables.

" Did 'ee hear ? 'Twere up at Cap'en Jollyfax's ! "

" Hear ? I'd think so ! Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun ! "

And so word passed all through Leigh and about on the moment, within house and out of

window. "Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun !  
Cap'en Jollyfax hev fired the gun !"

But, in fact, no sleeper in all Leigh bounced higher in his bed than Cap'en Jollyfax himself ; and that for good reason, for the gun was almost under his bedroom window.

The gun ! It was the gun ! Somebody had fired it ! Those boys—those rascal boys—rapscallion boys, cheeky boys, plaguey boys, villainous, accursed, infernal boys !

Cap'en Jollyfax fell into a pair of trousers and downstairs in one complicated gymnastic, and burst into the garden under the thin light of a clouded moon. There stood the gun, uncovered, and there by its side lay the tarpaulin—no, not the tarpaulin, it would seem—but a human figure ; a woman in a swoon.

Cap'en Jollyfax turned her over and stared close down into her face.

"Why !" he cried, "Polly ! Polly ! What's this ?"

With that her eyes opened. "Be that you, John ?" she said. "I den't count 'twould go off that fearful sudden !"

*Accelerated action.*

"D." (See Key paragraph "C.") Real dénouement camouflaged. Nearing climax (setting "under the thin light of a clouded moon.")

#### CLIMAX

Rapid dénouement and admirable compression into one neatly rounded-off humorous conclusion.

All further explanation . superfluous.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE COMMERCIAL SIDE

A WIDE market awaits the writer's work. The number of fiction magazines published every month (\*fortnightly) at the present time (1930) is over twenty :

|                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Argosy</i>            | <i>Novel</i>           |
| <i>Britannia and Eve</i> | <i>Pearson's</i>       |
| <i>Corner</i>            | <i>Premier</i>         |
| <i>Good Housekeeping</i> | <i>*Red</i>            |
| <i>Grand</i>             | <i>Royal</i>           |
| <i>Happy</i>             | <i>Storyteller</i>     |
| <i>Home</i>              | <i>Strand</i>          |
| <i>London</i>            | <i>Twenty-Story</i>    |
| <i>Merry</i>             | <i>*Violet</i>         |
| <i>Nash's</i>            | <i>Windsor</i>         |
| <i>New</i>               | <i>Woman's Journal</i> |

In addition to these a large number of periodicals publish fiction, e.g. :

|                          |                                |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Answers</i>           | <i>Everyman</i>                |
| <i>Blackwood's</i>       | <i>Home Chat</i>               |
| <i>Bystander</i>         | <i>Home Notes</i>              |
| <i>Chambers' Journal</i> | <i>John o' London's Weekly</i> |

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Modern Home</i>      | <i>Taller</i>            |
| <i>Modern Woman</i>     | <i>Tit-Bits</i>          |
| <i>My Home</i>          | <i>Truth</i>             |
| <i>Pearson's Weekly</i> | <i>Woman and Home</i>    |
| <i>Pictorial Weekly</i> | <i>Woman's Life</i>      |
| <i>Queen</i>            | <i>Woman's Pictorial</i> |
| <i>Quiver</i>           | <i>Woman's World</i>     |
| <i>Sketch</i>           |                          |

and many others.

A rough estimate of the number of short stories published every month in this country alone is three hundred. Nearly all these stories are the work of outside contributors. The free-lance who turns his attention to fiction has every prospect of success, provided his work is good enough. Editors have no interest in rejecting MSS. They welcome acceptable stories. It is a common delusion that the editor "rejects" automatically the work of unknown writers. Influence (which in journalism as in all other walks of life is, I admit, invaluable) may here and there just weigh the scale in favour of a "doubtful" story, and will often secure a quicker verdict on a MS., but, generally speaking, stories are judged absolutely on their merits. In fact, a good story by an unknown writer is sometimes doubly welcome, because usual rates of payment apply. Editors soon tire of paying inflated prices for "big" names.

So much for the market awaiting the amateur short-story writer. The next chapter contains, in addition to the editorial requirements of the chief magazines, an analysis of the requirements of the leading papers which



invite outside fiction contributions. This will doubtless prove of service to the young writer. It is designed to obviate the vast waste of everyone's time and trouble in dealing with inappropriately submitted MSS. Common sense in submitting MSS. is most uncommon. Stories are hastily written and typed out, and submitted in feverish haste to the first magazine that suggests itself. This is, of course, hopelessly wrong. It is true that certain short stories are sufficiently typical to be submitted to any one of a dozen magazines, but a little care and reflection would do much to indicate the most likely markets.

Having produced your story, it is a good plan to make up a list of the magazines and papers in the order determined by the likelihood of acceptance. I admit this is a difficult job for the inexperienced writer, but a careful analysis of the magazines month by month is well worth the trouble involved, and saves a tremendous amount of time and disappointment incurred through sending MSS. to magazines for which they are totally unsuitable.

The practical side of authorship should receive earnest attention from all who are anxious to succeed in getting their work into print.

### THE PREPARATION OF THE MS.

Nothing annoys an editor more than an untidy, dirty, or illegible MS. After all, he is human, and the sight of a carelessly submitted MS. is bound to prejudice him unfavourably. No effort should be spared to create as favourable an atmosphere as possible by submitting MSS. which conform to a high standard of neatness and cleanliness. It may seem absurd to refer to dirty MSS.,

but day after day soiled and grimy documents make their shabby bow on the editorial desk, hoping to be "considered favourably." It is no compliment to the writer's personal habits, the only alternative explanation being that he hopes the editor won't notice that the story has been through every other editor's hands before coming to him—which is worse.

MSS. should be typewritten—double-spaced and on one side of the paper only. No editor likes to read handwriting, however legible it may be. If typewriting is absolutely out of the question then make as neat a job as possible of it, and briefly explain in a covering note your reason for not having the MS. typewritten. But as a rule, the only satisfactory excuse for handwriting is lack of money. This is about the only serious outlay the writer has to make. Compared with other salesmen he is, in fact, in a very favourable position. His market is within reach of a 1½d. stamp, and his stock-in-trade necessitates but a small outlay in actual cash—pen, ink, paper—and ideas. But at the first opportunity he should most decidedly invest in a typewriter.

A well-typed MS. is the first step towards winning favourable consideration. Cheap and nasty typing is false economy. The size of the paper should be quarto, neither too thin nor too thick. Foolscap is not taboo, but quarto is to be preferred. The title page should contain the following details neatly set out :

# TITLE.

Author's Name.

Author's name and address (in bottom left-hand corner).  
The total number of words (in bottom right-hand corner).

The pages should be numbered consecutively, and fastened by a clip or paper-fastener in such a way as to assist convenient reading. Most typewriting concerns bind the story in a stout cover with cord or ribbon ; this is really the best way

A stamped-addressed envelope should be enclosed. The stamps should be of sufficient value and the envelope big enough to contain the MS. should it come back to roost. A covering letter is not really necessary, and if included should merely state briefly that you beg to offer the enclosed MS. (quote title, and *nom de plume*, if any). Don't write an explanatory rigmarole, let your story speak for itself. Don't inform the editor it is true to life or founded on fact, because he probably won't believe you ; and if he did, would almost certainly turn it down on sight. He wants fiction, not facts. (To a fiction editor, facts spell libel actions.)

Don't mention that it's your first effort—*that* won't improve your prospects.

Don't tell the editor you are starving and if he doesn't accept your story you will commit suicide ; he isn't interested. Don't tell him how much you enjoy his magazine ; you're a salesman now, not a flattering reader.

Don't insist on an immediate decision ; that's the way to put the editorial back up. If you have published work to your credit, there is no harm in mentioning it, but don't overload the letter with details of your accomplishments. Your story will be judged on its merits.

Address the MS. to "The Editor." Don't try to find out his name ; if he doesn't know you he may resent it.

If possible, avoid folding the MS., especially if it is of a considerable length ; pack it flat, never roll it.

Don't call on the editor unless you are actually negotiating with him. A personal interview—even if you obtain one—will not further the cause of your MS. But if an editor writes expressing interest in your work and inviting you to call, don't hesitate to do so, for he may be able to give you some valuable advice, and an indication perhaps of the kind of work he wants.

If an editor accepts one of your stories, don't immediately bombard him with everything you have ever written.

Never write long letters to editors. They have a lot of work to get through. In fact, most amateurs do not realise what an enormous amount of money is spent annually in the form of editorial time in reading unsolicited MSS. Suppose magazines charged a small fee for reading every story submitted ! And yet in one way it would be quite reasonable to do so ; every MS. you submit costs them money. Yet, so anxious are editors to obtain good "stuff," that they cheerfully wade daily through a huge pile of MSS. in the hope of discovering one or two that are suitable material for their pages.

Don't ask for a personal criticism of your story. Editors are too busy to tell you what is wrong with it, and it is no part of their function to instruct beginners.

Never submit the same MS. to more than one magazine at the same time. This is not "cricket." Besides, you are in an awkward position if by any chance both accept it.

Don't be impatient for a decision ; editors hate being worried. Allow a reasonable time to elapse, say three

weeks or even longer. Then, if you must, write a brief, polite note, mentioning the date on which the MS. was submitted, and venturing to ask his decision.

If your MS. comes back—and at first they usually do—don't write the editor a sarcastic or plaintive letter—he won't read it. Send it somewhere else. If the MS. begins to look worn or travel-stained, replace the title-page with a fresh one.

Always keep a note of where you have sent your MSS., and the dates; if you have a large number out, it is advisable to keep a card index.

If the story gets mislaid or lost, don't write threatening litigation; the editor is probably covered by a published warning that he cannot hold himself responsible for the safety of MSS. In your own interest, keep a copy of your stories.

Don't send a story to a magazine or periodical with which you are not familiar. It is sheer waste of time submitting the kind of story which is alien to the general spirit of the magazine. As a rule, the editor of a fiction magazine aims at catering for all tastes by publishing every month a variety of stories. Therefore examine the proportion of love stories, adventure stories, sea stories, nature stories, etc., which appear in the pages of the different magazines, and decide which hold out the best prospects for the MS. in question. Don't send a sentimental love story to *Blackwood's*; nor a tale of the Wild and Woolly West to *Good Housekeeping*, unless, of course, it has a strong love interest.

Don't accuse the harassed editor of not reading your MS. An old lady once tried to catch an editor out by sticking down the corners of two pages of the story.

When she got the story back they were still stuck down. Triumphant, she wrote and pointed out that her story could not have been properly read. The editor replied :

" DEAR MADAM,

" If you will separate the two pages in question, you will find that I have taken the liberty of pencilling my initials in the corner."

Don't submit your MSS. indiscriminately. Study your market carefully. One magazine's meat is another's poison.

Make a list of magazines or papers in the order of "probability," and send the MS. to each in turn.

Don't submit Christmas ghost stories in June, nor in *December* ; the right time is about August, when the October magazines are going to press. Similarly, cricket and tennis stories should be sent in March or April.

If you are a raw recruit, be content to accept ordinary rates of payment. If a magazine makes you an offer for a story, work out how much it is per thousand words, and if it is not less than two guineas per thousand, accept it. In order to get into print, it is sometimes expedient to accept less from the cheaper weekly fiction papers. But a magazine of any standing ought to pay at least two guineas per thousand. The majority pay more. No reputable magazine will publish a story without payment to the author. Remember, in the interests of writers generally, that " a thing that's worth printing is worth paying for."

It is generally understood that the offer of a MS. to an English magazine comprises the first British serial rights only. If, however, you get a good offer for the

copyright of a story, accept it. Disposing only of the first British serial rights leaves you free to negotiate the American and foreign rights, dramatic and film rights. Prices run very much higher in America. Twenty pounds is a good price for an English magazine to pay for a story of ordinary length—say four thousand words—but in the American market the same story may fetch one hundred pounds or more. £200 is not a big price for a short story; Irvin S. Cobb is paid £750 for many of his stories. But the beginner should confine his first efforts to the English magazines; the American standard is generally higher than ours, and as a rule only our “big” names—Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Rafael Sabatini, Cosmo Hamilton, Sir Philip Gibbs, Michael Arlen, Robert Hichens—are featured in the best American magazines. The second- and third-rate American magazines are usually too American in tone and make-up to entertain the average English story.

The question of illustrations seldom affects the author. The editor buys the story and sends it to the artist for illustration. The writer has no say in the matter. Sometimes author and artist will collaborate and submit their joint efforts; but this is very unusual, and the plan is certainly not recommended to unknown writers. It is interfering with the editor's province.

Why not a literary agent? The majority of successful authors dispose of their work through agents. The plan has several advantages; by leaving the business side to an agent, the author is free to concentrate on his output without the harassing and depressing interruption of rejection slips; many writers, too, feel that they are incapable of handling the business side. Again, it is

probably true that agents secure better terms than the writer can himself. In the case of comparatively unknown authors, the agent's imprint (if it is a reputable one) will often secure a prompt reading, and perhaps even a more favourable consideration than if the MS. came direct from the author. The agent claims to specialise in editorial requirements, and by keeping in daily touch with the different markets to know more accurately than the writer what the state of the market is, what types of story are in demand, what magazines are "full up," and so on. On the whole, the literary agent system in this country is a sound one, and the service rendered is well worth the fee charged. The agent's commission naturally varies, but ten to fifteen per cent. on prices accepted (subject to the approval of the author) is usual.

The number of reputable agents is not large, and the young writer should be warned against dealings with so-called literary agents who invite aspiring authors to send them MSS. and then offer to dispose of their work provided they pay substantial "reading fees." In the first place, no reputable agents will handle a writer's work unless they are satisfied that it is of a sufficiently high standard. Some agents make a nominal charge to read and criticise, if necessary, the work of a writer unknown to them, but this charge is always a nominal one. The leading literary agents will not undertake to handle work that in their judgment is unlikely to find a market.

As a general rule, it is not advisable for the beginner to worry about an agent. There is plenty of time for that when he begins to climb the literary ladder, and the business side becomes an important question. Not until



a dozen or so stories have been published should the writer—in average circumstances—approach an agent. A list of the leading agents is to be found in *The Writers' and Artists' Year-Book* ; if you are in any doubt at all, a polite request, accompanied by a stamped-addressed envelope, will usually elicit the desired information from the editor himself.

A final word. Let no young writer be discouraged by rejection slips. In the first three years of his literary career, W L George collected 723 !

## CHAPTER X

### WHAT EDITORS WANT

*Note.—The leading fiction magazine editors have very courteously contributed a statement of their individual requirements to the first section of this chapter. As this is the most important market for the short story writer's work I hope the chapter will be of practical service.*

*The Argosy.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD. Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C. 4.)

The contents of *The Argosy* are best described by the sub-title "The World's Best Stories." While this magazine consists mainly of contemporary and classic masterpiece stories, British and foreign, its pages are not closed to the unknown author who can write stories sufficiently outstanding to warrant their acceptance. It is only fair to say that the standard set is a high one and that the mediocre is rigorously excluded.

*Britannia and Eve* (Inveresk House, Strand W.C.2.)

Being a monthly magazine for men as well as women, it follows that the fiction must be chosen accordingly. That is why the stories have more 'punch' and a wider range than those generally found in a purely women's magazine.

The ideal story is one which appeals more or less equally, to both sexes, not an impossible attainment in these days when men and women so often share a common outlook. But as

each issue contains half a dozen stories there is room for both types—the “adventurous romance” with a strong masculine tang to it, and the “love story” with a more feminine flavour, yet possessing, for preference, a novel and colourful background.

The Editor’s choice leans always to the fresh and the modern. The “drawing-room comedy” must have humour and charm; while “blood and thunder” is unacceptable without genuine atmosphere and that touch of distinction without which the discerning reader can never be wholly gripped.

*Britannia and Eve* does not run serials, the nearest approach being a series of stories under a common denominator but each complete in itself.

To judge by recent issues the Editor is also attempting a new idea in article-writing which might profitably be considered by those writers with a gift for the vivid and dramatic. He is extremely keen on “feature articles” which combine the drama of the short story with actual historical or present day fact.

*Cassell’s Magazine.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD. Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

An illustrated magazine containing short stories, articles, series and sometimes serials. The fiction should preferably appeal to both men and women and should contain plot, movement and human interest. Lengths may vary from 1,500 words to 20,000 words. Potential contributors are warned against submitting psychological studies, unpleasant sex themes, and stories in which brutality and horror are stressed.

*The Corner Magazine.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD., Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

A magazine containing swift-action stories of all kinds—mystery, adventure, love and humour. The maximum

length is about 5,000 words. Very short stories of about 1,000 to 1,500 words are required for the feature known as "Told in the Corner" Tales. All stories submitted must have strong plots and must be written crisply and without decorations

*Good Housekeeping.* (NATIONAL MAGAZINE CO., LTD., 153 Queen Victoria Street, E.C.4.) "specialises in wholesome fiction appealing to the educated woman of every class. The points we look for are good writing—not the slipshod, ultra-smart variety—clever characterisation and realism, and stories may be flavoured with the domestic touch, adventure, humour or tragedy so long as they reflect any facet of the miscellany of life.

"We are always on the outlook for really good writers, and all manuscripts submitted are very carefully read. There is no hard and fast rule as to the length, but about three to eight thousand words is a comfortable length. Payment is by arrangement."

*The Grand Magazine.* (8-11 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.)

The Editor of the *Grand Magazine* is glad to consider well-written, dramatic and light-hearted stories of five thousand words or under, with a strong love interest and a pleasant atmosphere. Contributors are given a quick verdict and payment on acceptance.

*The Happy Mag.* (8-11 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2.)

The cheerful, straightforward love story—lightheartedly written—with as few characters as possible—any length up to five thousand words—characters and incidents that can be easily visualised by the average reader. All MSS. are promptly read and payment is made on acceptance. Also bright storyettes of eight hundred words—not mere dialogue

—of a cheerful nature. New writers are always welcome, but any story submitted should be on the lines indicated."

*Harper's Bazaar* (9 Stratton Street, Piccadilly, W.1.) has a preference for "sophisticated short stories, ultra modern setting, humorous situations, wherever possible, likely to appeal to the Bright Young People. Gaiety and wit are chief requirements. Length about 5,500 to 6,000 words per story, or instalment."

*London Magazine and Premier Magazine.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

"Quite often I am asked by would-be contributors to tell them the subject and length of stories suitable to my magazines. The absurdity of the question is obvious, for one can readily imagine the sales—or rather the returns—of a magazine that ran stories of equal lengths and dealing with one subject. A short story should grip from the first word to the last, and if it does that it matters not whether it is two thousand or twenty thousand words in length. Also, the short story that counts is that which deals with life *as it is*: the characters should not be merely creatures of the author's imagination, but living, breathing actors in the story he has to tell. If a reader, as he reads, says to himself (or herself) this character might be me, the author has succeeded. The soul-storms arising from love, jealousy, passion . . . all these things make stories, if logically and not too theatrically treated. Such subjects may be written of in one thousand words, or one hundred thousand. They may be placed in Mayfair or Bermondsey, but if the psychology be true they are certain of their following. Either a story is written because it *had* to be written, or it is merely a part of the day's work of the author. It is not very difficult to separate the sheep from the goats. There is no golden rule to the selection of magazine fiction."

*My Home and Woman and Home.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

"In choosing the stories for *Woman and Home* and *My Home*, I have few prejudices—provided the story is written with feeling.

"There must be a strong love element ; I do not find mystery stories or detective stories at all popular

"I like stories which take you along with them so that the reader may feel she watches the story happen

"Sophistication does not appeal to us very much unless it embroiders an emotional story.

"The length should be anything from two to seven thousand words."

*Nash's Magazine.* (NATIONAL MAGAZINE CO LTD. 153 Queen Victoria Street, E.C.4.)

"*Nash's Magazine* covers a very wide field of reading interest. We aim at quality all the time ; quantity is a minor matter. We are what is known as a "class" magazine, selling for one shilling monthly, and we cater for a public with taste drawn from the middle, upper-middle and upper classes.

"We do not limit ourselves to any particular type of story, but consider detective, mystery love, adventure, and domestic stories all likely to interest our readers, the acceptance of work depending on its merit alone. Short stories should not be more than 8,000 words, but they can be as short as the author likes.

"Articles must not be of a "topical" nature as our press day is two months previous to publication. We welcome brightly written articles on science, travel, politics and the arts, as well as humorous work.

"We have a small opening for verses of the sonnet or ballad type and a very small opening for smart, witty talks used as editorials or page features of about 300-500 words."

"The amount of payment is settled by arrangement with the author. We have no fixed rate of pay, but make an offer for the work we consider suitable."

*New Magazine.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

An illustrated magazine devoted entirely to romantic stories. Only stories appealing definitely to young women and containing a strong romantic note are considered. Sex stories, however, are barred. Stories may be light or dramatic, but in either instance they must contain a note of romance.

*The Novel Magazine.* (16-18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

"There are four types of stories which I want for the *Novel Magazine* :

1. Stories dealing with human problems.
2. Humorous stories.
3. Stories of adventure.
4. Stories of crime.

"The stories should not, in the ordinary way, be more than five thousand words in length, although I do sometimes use a long complete story of twelve to fifteen thousand words. In the case of these stories I prefer an author to submit the first three thousand words and a synopsis before completing.

"Contributors should avoid the indefinite style of writing or treatment of the plot. I do not want unhappy endings unless absolutely unavoidable."

*Pearson's Magazine.* (16-18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

"What editors want is a question which is not easily answered, because a plot for a short story which proves unacceptable from nine authors might be so endowed with life and realism by the pen of the tenth that the story would command acceptance.

"I do ask, however, that stories sent to me be about every-day people, as distinct from what one might call novelette heroes and heroines; a story that deals with the sort of people whom we all know, and whose feelings we

understand, and this applies to love stories, to humorous stories, to detective stories, and to adventure stories.

"I prefer an English setting, and some measure of love interest is an advantage rather than handicap.

"I have no place for gloomy and tragic stories for unpleasantly sexy stories, or unexplained ghost stories.

"The length of MSS. should be from two to five thousand words.'

*The Red Magazine.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD. Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

*The Red Magazine* has an affection for young authors established authors have an affection for the *Red Magazine*. It has a catholic taste, and provided a story be there to tell it has not many prejudices. It does, however, believe that insistence on sex or the unpleasant is bad business. Length is always a consideration for an editor, who realises at the same time that a story should be allowed to tell itself in a natural form

*The Royal Magazine* (16-18 Henrietta Street. W.C.2.)

'Good short stories of every conceivable type interest me, for in *The Royal* I try to provide the greatest possible variety of fiction.

"I am a little biased against the American kind of domestic triangle story and against spook stories that bring in controversial religious views. The very light and fluffy kind of love story, the commonplace thriller with trap-doors and descending ceilings and the broad burlesque humorous story do not appeal to me at all.

'But with these exceptions, I am open to accept stories of all types—sea, love, comedy, adventure, wild west, detective, or anything else. The setting can be either at home or abroad, and the length anything between 2,000 and 7,000 words.



"My one stipulation is that the story must be capable of holding the reader's interest from beginning to end somehow or other—the way in which it is done does not matter. In this case the reader can be taken as a reasonably intelligent kind of person without highbrow leanings who reads a story for relaxation and not as a brain exercise."

*The Story-Teller.* (THE AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

An unillustrated fiction magazine depending for its popularity upon the quality and variety of its contents. Its short stories vary in length from 1,500 words to 20,000 words. Work submitted to this periodical must be convincingly treated—the machine-made and artificial story not being required. Long, complete novels of from 15,000 to 20,000 words and serials are frequently published. Series of stories based on a central character or theme are welcomed. Contributors are drawn from well-known, not-so-well-known, and unknown authors. "Story interest" and quality of writing are equally important. New writers who are sincerely interested in their craft are encouraged to submit their best work.

*Twenty-Story.* (ODHAM'S PRESS LTD., 85-94 Long Acre, W.C.2.)

This magazine offers a splendid opportunity to new writers, as all stories submitted are considered on their merits, no attention being paid to author's names. Special requirements are for high-class stories of from fifteen hundred to ten thousand words in length. Love, adventure, Nature, sea detective, sporting and humorous stories being in constant demand. The standard set for this magazine is a very high one, and stories submitted should be above the average in point of plot and writing. Very prompt decisions are given on all stories submitted, and the editor is pleased at all times to hear from would-be contributors.

*The Windsor Magazine.* (MESSRS. WARD LOCK & CO., LTD.,  
Salisbury Square, E.C.4.)

"Many of the short stories which are nowadays frequently mentioned as masterly examples of that form of fiction made their first appearance in the *Windsor Magazine*, among them some of the most remarkable pieces of work in that *genre* of Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle, W. W. Jacobs, Anthony Hope, Maurice Hewlett, 'Q,' Arnold Bennett, and to these have been added notably stories by such newcomers in the field as John Russell, Hugh Walpole and Dornford Yates; and the *Windsor* is therefore particularly interested in examining the experiments in short story writing of other authors, whether known, or as yet unknown, to fame.

"The recent growth of interest in the art of the short story has evidently inspired much new work, of which by no means all approximate to good models. The *Windsor* draws a distinct line between short stories which are complete episodes or situations, informed with the necessary singleness of emotional appeal or humorous effect and developed with entire unity of action, and those many stories which are 'short' only in length but are either mere fragments or, on the other hand, condensed novels, suggesting at every turn that their themes would have lent themselves more satisfactorily to fuller treatment.

"The *Windsor* asks that a short story should be a clearly defined and complete cameo of some episode or situation in which the motives and forces at work are concerned solely with the theme in presentation.

"The *Windsor* likes its stories, grave or gay, to cover a wide range of subject-matter, character and local colour, modern life, providing as it does, many an interesting theme other than the love story, beyond which too many authors seldom travel, and for length, anything from two thousand words to six thousand forms a suitable working basis."

*Woman's Journal.* (AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Because one of the most important duties of *Woman's Journal* is to entertain, the fiction published in it is considered and selected with the greatest care. Serials and short stories are regular features of the magazine. The latter must have a definite appeal. They must be about women and men and love, not about policemen, detectives and crime. Characters should be those whom readers can understand and live with; characters they can see and touch and carry away with them. Good style, but story before style. An interesting tale is of far greater importance than any special subtlety in the telling. Most magazine readers prefer story to style. If writers can tell their short stories in five thousand words that length is better than six thousand words, but space can be found for six thousand words if the story is right. Settings of stories can be anywhere in the world but not too far from civilisation. Young writers are encouraged, particularly those who are interested in short story writing.

*Note.*—It cannot too often be emphasised that the writer should carefully study his market before submitting MSS to editors. Current issues of papers and magazines should be examined very carefully. The following alphabetical lists comprise practically all the periodicals which invite and pay for short stories from outside contributors. To assist convenient reference, periodicals have been variously classified under subject-heads.

#### FEMININE AND DOMESTIC

*Christian Herald.* (Weekly, 2d.) (6 Tudor Street, E.C. 4.)

Stories about three thousand words of a religious or temperance character are considered.

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*Christian Novels.* (Weekly, 2d.) (SHUREY'S PUBLICATIONS, LTD., 1 Farringdon Avenue, London, E.C.4.)

Contains long complete novel of a homely type about 23,000 words. Also one serial. Payment on acceptance.

*Christian World.* (Weekly, 2d.) (Clock House, 7 Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.2.)

Complete stories (one to two thousand five hundred words) on religious, philanthropic and social topics are considered.

*Complete Novel Weekly.* (2d.) (SHUREY'S PUBLICATIONS, LTD. 1 Farringdon Avenue, London, E.C.4.)

Consists of one long novel of 30,000 words. Nothing hackneyed, nothing of the old-fashioned novelette type is required, but really modern stories of passion and emotion rather than incident. It is better for authors to submit opening chapter and synopsis instead of complete MS. Payment on acceptance.

*Complete Story Teller.* (Monthly, 7d.) (12, 14 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, E.C.4.)

Features short stories (three to twelve thousand words). Payment varies.

*Family Herald.* (Weekly, 2d.) (12, 14 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street E.C.4.)

Stories (two to ten thousand words) of family interest. Controversial topics undesirable. Payment varies.

*Family Journal.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Short stories of homely and even humorous character—two thousand words long. Payment by arrangement. See (a).

*Girl's Mirror.* (Weekly, 2d.) (SHUREY'S PUBLICATIONS, LTD., 1 Farringdon Avenue, London, E.C.4.)

Contains one long novel of 20,000 words, sensational, with

strong love interest, but no sex question must be introduced and all must be fit for family reading.

*Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine.* (Monthly. 1s.)  
(4 Bouverie Street E.C.4.)

Stories of feminine appeal about 2,500 words long.

*Home Chat.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street. E.C.4.)

Short stories, not necessarily ultra-sentimental, from about fifteen hundred to three thousand words. See (a).

*Home Companion* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Features strong simple love stories of working people, about two thousand words. See (a).

*Home Notes.* (Weekly, 2d.) (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

"Snappy" love stories from fifteen hundred to two thousand words long. £1 1s. od. to £2 2s. od. rate of payment.

*Lady.* (Weekly, 6d.) (39-40 Bedford Street, W.C.2.)

Occasional short stories (five thousand words). Preliminary letter preferred. Payment by arrangement.

*Lady's Companion.* (Weekly 2d.) (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

Bright stories from three to four thousand words. Payment £1 5s. od. per thousand words.

*Miss Modern.* (Monthly 6d.) (GEORGE NEWNES LTD., 8-11 Southampton St. W.C.2.)

*Modern Home.* (Monthly, 6d.) (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

Romantic and dramatic stories required length two to six thousand words.

*Modern Woman.* (Monthly, 6d.) (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

Romantic and dramatic stories required length two to six thousand words.

*My Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (MESSRS. JOHN LENG & CO., LTD. 186 Fleet Street, E.C.4, and Bank Street, Dundee.)

Short stories of light love interest appealing to working girls. Payment liberal.

*Peg's Paper.* (Weekly 2d.) (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

Short stories from two thousand to three thousand five hundred words long are invited but of essentially strong love interest. Payment arranged

*Smart Novels.* (Weekly, 2d.) (SHUREY'S PUBLICATIONS, LTD. 1 Farringdon Avenue, London E.C.4.)

Contains serials and a complete novel of about 25,000 words. Contributions of the ordinary novelette type are not wanted but there is an opening for really well-written realistic stories which have a strong love interest. Payment on acceptance. Synopsis and opening chapter only should be submitted

*Sunday at Home.* (Monthly 1s.) (4 Bouverie Street, E.C.4.)

The tone is rather high and short stories (three thousand words) must not be of too frivolous a type.

*Sunday Companion.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

Stories which should be of about two thousand five hundred words should be semi-religious in tone See (a).

*Week-End Novels.* (Weekly, 2d.) (ALLIED NEWSPAPERS LTD. 200 Gray's Inn Road W.C.1.)

Short stories of two to three thousand words, brightly and

daintily written, are used. Payment £1 1s. od. to £2 2s. od. per thousand words.

*Weekly Welcome* (Weekly, 2d.) (12 Fetter Lane, E.C.4.)

Special attention given to new writers. Length of stories three to four thousand words. Payment liberal.

*Wife and Home.* (Monthly, 6d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

A magazine devoted to home and feminine interests.

*Woman's Life.* (Weekly, 2d.) (8-11 Southampton Street W.C.2.)

Bright, chatty short stories of about two thousand to two thousand five hundred words. A strong personal touch the feature of the paper.

*Woman's Pictorial.* (Weekly, 3d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4)

Cordially invites stories of approximately three thousand to five thousand words. See (a).

*Woman's Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

An illustrated domestic paper: features short stories. See (a).

*Woman's World.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Short stories of the usual type from two to three thousand words. Payment by arrangement.

#### JUVENILE

*Boys' Own Paper* (Monthly, 1s.) (4 Bouverie Street E.C.4.)

Writers who cannot wait to be considered are advised not to contribute. Short stories two to four thousand words. Payment on publication: £1 1s. od. per page and upwards.

## SHORT STORY WRITING FOR PROFIT 179

*Boys Magazine* (Weekly, 2d.) (ALLIED NEWSPAPERS LTD.  
200 Gray's Inn Road W.C.1.)

Prospective contributors should study magazine for type of adventure and sport-story required. Payment varies

*British Boys' Annual.* (5s. net.) (Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

Caters for boys of twelve to sixteen. Setting preferably in Australia or Canada. Payment by arrangement

*British Girls' Annual.* (5s. net.) (Fleetway House Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

Stories of school and home life, and adventure, suitable for girls of twelve to sixteen. Length three to five thousand words

*Bubbles.* (Weekly, 2d.) (Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

Stories with coloured illustrations for young children. See (a).

*Butterfly.* (Weekly, 1d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Complete stories of exciting adventure. Study the paper. See (a).

*Cassell's Children's Annual* (6s. 6d. and 5s. net.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Bright, pointed stories for very young children. Payment by arrangement

*Chums.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Complete stories four thousand five hundred or seven thousand five hundred words long of school life or adventure.



*Jolly Book.* (Annual) (NELSON & SONS, LTD., 35 Paternoster Row, E.C.4.)

Short stories between one and two thousand words No fairy tales.

*Little Folks.* (Monthly 1s.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street E.C.4.)

A good market for short stories of bright and wholesome tone with good plots (one thousand five hundred to two thousand words best length.)

*Merry and Bright.* (Weekly 1d.) (Fleetway House Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)  
See (a).

*Playbox Annual.* (6s.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Contains about twenty short stories length two thousand words. For very young children.

*Playtime.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

School stories and fairy tales (twelve hundred words).

*Popular.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Long complete stories (about seven thousand words), of school, adventure and detectives

*Puck.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

*Rainbow.* (Weekly 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

SHORT STORY WRITING FOR PROFIT 181

*Schoolgirls' Own.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

*Scout.* (Weekly, 2d.) (28 Maiden Lane, W.C.2.)

Healthy stories (fifteen hundred to five thousand words).  
Payment : £1 per thousand and upwards.

*Tiger Tim's Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

*Tiger Tim's Annual.* (6s.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

*Toby.* (Monthly, 7d.) (ODHAM'S PRESS, LTD., 93 Long Acre, W.C.2.)

One or two stories of school life and adventure. Five hundred to three thousand five hundred words long.

*Wonderland Annual.* (6s.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

See (a).

*Young England.* (Annually, 6s.) (57 Ludgate Hill, E.C.4.)

Stories of two thousand words or less for educated boys. Matter should be submitted by March.

SOCIAL

*Bystander.* (Weekly, 1s.) (Inveresk House, 346 Strand, W.C.2.)

Short stories, modern in spirit, about two thousand words.

*Graphic.* (Weekly, 1s.) (Inveresk House, 346 Strand W.C.2.)

Short stories of one to three thousand words. The rather

"clever," sophisticated type of crook stories with a twist at the end appear to be required.

*Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic*. (Weekly, 1s.) (Inveresk House, 346 Strand, W.C.2.)

Short stories about 2,000 words—preferably sporting subjects.

*Sketch*. (Weekly, 1s.) (Inveresk House, 346 Strand, W.C.2.)

Stories of about seventeen hundred to three thousand words are considered; should be of a light character

*Tatler* (Weekly 1s.) (Inveresk House, 346 Strand W.C.2.)

Social and sporting stories of about fifteen hundred words.

## HUMOROUS

*Humorist*. (Weekly, 2d.) (GEORGE NEWNES 8-11 Southampton Street Strand W.C.2.)

Humorous sketches (up to fifteen hundred words) rather than short stories wanted Study the paper

*London Opinion* (Weekly 2d.) (8-11 Southampton Street W.C.2.)

Amusing short stories of one thousand to one thousand five hundred words. "Nothing heavy morbid or neurotic."

*Passing Show*. (Weekly, 2d.) (ODHAM'S 93 Long Acre, W.C.2.)

Amusing short stories of twelve to fifteen hundred words. Payment good. "The Editor is on the look-out for young writers."

*Punch* (Weekly, 6d.) (10 Bouverie Street, E.C.4.)

Sketches and short articles in prose or verse are accepted from outside contributors

SHORT STORY WRITING FOR PROFIT 183  
LITERARY

*Blackwood's Magazine.* (Monthly, 2s. 6d.) (37 Paternoster Row, E.C.4., and 45 George Street, Edinburgh.)

"Strongly original" fiction required. Must be first-class work.

*Chamber's Journal.* (Monthly 1s.) (38 Soho Square, W.1. and 339 High Street, Edinburgh.)

Stories two to ten thousand words of good literary quality.

*Cornhill Magazine.* (Monthly 1s. 6d.) (50 Albemarle Street, W.1.)

Publishes good-class short stories four to five thousand words.

*English Review.* (Monthly 1s.) (4 Dean's Yard, Westminster S.W.1.)

Accepts occasional short stories (ordinary length) of literary merit. Style important.

*Everyman.* (Weekly 2d.) (13, 14 Great Queen Street W.C.2.)

Short stories of merit two thousand to two thousand five hundred words, are given consideration

*John o' London's Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (NEWNES 8-11 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2.)

Features a weekly short story two thousand five hundred to three thousand words. Historical stories often accepted.

*Time and Tide.* (Weekly 6d.) (32 Bloomsbury Street W.C.1.)

Occasional short stories (about one thousand words) of literary merit.

## SPORTING

*Cycling.* (Weekly 2d.) (5-15 Rosebery Avenue. E.C.1.)

"A limited amount of fiction with a pronounced cycling interest."

(See also *Chums Boys' Own Paper* and the Juvenile publications.)

## GENERAL

*Answers.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Features one short story in each issue about two thousand words long ; love interest favoured.

*Everybody's Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (114 Fleet Street E.C.4.)

Mystery, love, crime or adventure stories of fifteen hundred words or under.

*Ideas.* (Weekly, 2d.) (ALLIED NEWSPAPERS, 200 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.)

Stories eighteen hundred words long, humorous or of pleasant domestic setting. Payment varies.

*Pearson's Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (PEARSON'S, 18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2.)

Short stories about eighteen hundred to two thousand five hundred words humorous or domestic.

*Pictorial Weekly.* (Weekly, 2d.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Good short stories, two to four thousand five hundred words, of a light or dramatic nature.

See (a).

*Quiver.* (Monthly, 1s.) (AMALGAMATED PRESS, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

Short stories two or four thousand words 'strong but not sensational.' Domestic stories also used.

## SHORT STORY WRITING FOR PROFIT 185

*Tit-Bits.* (Weekly 2d.) (NEWNES, 8-11 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2.)

Features a weekly short story of general interest about two thousand words.

*Truth.* (Weekly 9d.) (Truth Buildings, Carteret Street, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.1.)

A weekly "Queer Story" fifteen hundred to three thousand words. Study this market before submitting MSS. An opportunity for Grand Guignol experts.

*Weekly Scotsman.* (Weekly 2d.) (24 North Bridge Street, Edinburgh.)

One short story per issue. two or three thousand words long.

*Weekly Telegraph.* (Weekly, 2d.) (SIR W. C. LENG & CO., LTD, 180-181 Fleet Street E.C.4. and Sheffield.)

Short stories of general interest. When submitting, mark envelope "Manuscript Department." Study this market.

## NEWSPAPERS

*N.B.—As newspaper policy in regard to short stories is liable to considerable fluctuation it is impossible to classify requirements. Several London newspapers have experimented with the publication of short stories notably in the summer season, and these should be noted, together with the lengths required. The "Daily Mail," "Daily Mirror," "Sunday Dispatch," "Sunday Express" and "Sunday Pictorial" are some of the newspapers which have accepted short stories. Payment is generally good*

## SYNDICATES

(a) *Amalgamated Press* (Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.)

MSS. submitted to the Central Fiction Editor receive

consideration for all of the firm's publications. The Fiction Editor is always willing to advise promising young writers.

*D. C. Thomson & Co., Ltd.*

MSS. submitted to the Fiction Editor receive consideration for any of their publications that may be interested.

*Tillotson's Newspaper Literature Bureau.* (Bolton Lancs.)

Accepts short stories about three thousand words of love, adventure, mystery and romance.

*Northern Newspaper Syndicate.* (Kendal)

Original short stories (about three thousand words) considered.

*Newspaper Features, Ltd.* (23 Fleet Street, E.C.4.)

Accepts powerful human stories of a popular appeal, about two to three thousand words long.

*N.B.—Details of markets naturally vary from day to day. This list should be kept up to date by the writer himself or by reference to the current "Writers' and Artists' Year Book" (Black, 4s. 6d.), from which much of the information in this section has been derived. This is a valuable book of reference which no writer should be without.*

# **JOURNALISM FOR PROFIT**





## FOREWORD

THERE is a general opinion among people who read newspapers instead of writing them that journalism is an easy game, needing no qualifications except a slap-dash style, but providing considerable money prizes for those who get on the right side of editorial favour. I know particularly how this idea prevails, because hardly a week passes without bringing me letters from unknown correspondents who desire introductions to Fleet Street, or advice on the best way to gain an income by "free-lance" writing. Ex-officers on the unemployed list, schoolmasters on poor pay, widows with delicate daughters, girl typists with literary aspirations, retired Generals with too much leisure and strong views, and Oxford undergraduates accepted or rejected in *The Isis*, are pleased to believe that if I give them a few friendly notes to influential editors the doors of Fleet Street will be opened to them, with golden promises. For that reason among others I am glad that Mr. Michael Joseph has written this book. In future I shall refer my correspondents to its practical advice and discreet cautions. In the past I called their attention to a book of my own in which, under the thin veil of fiction, I endeavoured to reveal the uncertainty, the hardships and the disappointments inseparable from journalistic life, but the touch of romance in that novel of mine quite spoilt the moral of its squalid realism, and I have a guilty knowledge that its pages have lured a number of innocents into the steep and narrow way of journalistic ambition. No such fault lies in this book by Mr. Michael Joseph. At least he has given no romantic glamour to his analysis, but in a business-like way has set down the debit and credit account of journalistic values, revealed the difficulties as well as the opportunities, and, most useful of all, explained the training and quality necessary

for even the most modest achievement in newspapers and magazines. He is, indeed, at great pains to strip the career of journalism of any kind of false glamour. He insists that it is a "trade" and makes the selling of newspaper articles and the business of journalism as matter of fact as that of selling boots or buttonhooks. There I quarrel with him a little, for to my mind journalism is a profession and not a trade, at least in those departments which lie beyond the cash basis of values as calculated by proprietors, directors, and business managers, who for the most part are not journalists at all.

In a way, every profession is a "trade." The lawyer sells his eloquence or his arguments, sometimes at fancy prices. The professional soldier sells his valour or gunnery ability for a certain amount of pay and a few ribbons. Even the poet hopes that he may live by selling his wares, and some, like Shakespeare and Ella Wheeler Willcox, have been known to do so. Journalism on its literary side is, I think, beyond most other careers a profession or vocation because a young man who enters its ranks must have special qualities of mind beyond the ordinary ability necessary to the buying and selling of the usual commodities of life, must devote himself to his work with a self-sacrifice and self-training not so directly needed in some other branches of labour, and must seek some reward beyond that of hard cash and a safe career, in the technique, craftsmanship, and adventure of his job. At least anyone who enters the literary side of journalism merely as a trade is, in my opinion, bound to hideous disappointment, and will live to curse the day when he was tempted that way. Because the great prizes—even the moderate prizes—of this career do not go to the man with the trading mind, but to those who put their work first and their pay second, to those who, as special correspondents, will risk their health often, and even their lives sometimes, on a story which seems more to them than the cashier's pay bill, and who, as special article writers, or sub-editors, or leader-writers, or reporters, have a touch of art, a feeling for the *mot juste*, a sense of Life's drama, a desire for truth, a gift of narrative, some quality of character or humour which is communicated to their readers. Without some such qualities beyond mere hack work there are no prizes, and men or women lacking them and remaining on the lowest rungs of the journalistic ladder could get greater rewards in the ordinary business world. At least they would get more

security with less anxiety. Mr. Joseph in this book rather deprecates the idea that journalism is "precarious," although he admits that "in journalism the natural law is the survival of the fittest." I think he underestimates the uncertainty. Ill-health, a change of proprietorship, a hasty word with a nerve-racked editor, worst of all that "loss of touch" which happens sometimes to the most brilliant journalist after years of hard work—twenty years of devotion to one paper, quite unpaid in hard cash, quite unpayable—will cause a man to be flung out of his job into the cold streets. It does not happen like that in the Civil Service, in the Army, the Law, Medicine, the Church. It happens many times in Fleet Street and its tributaries. The journalist is a man who lives on his wits. He backs his own brain, with no reserves. He sells the quality of his soul (sometimes a poor thing, but his own) to proprietors and editors who count by results and make no allowance (they cannot do so in justice to the paper) for work that has a tired look. A journalist dare not lose his interest in the trivialities, the futilities, that are representative of life's pageantry and peep-shows. Wedding bells must always ring gladly in his ears. The bride must always look beautiful. The latest "story" must always be the most important thing in the world, to him. The headline must always be "arresting." The leading article must always be portentous in wisdom and pointed in phrase—in spite of influenza, headache, nagging cares at home. He must be "alive" in Fleet Street slang, or dead, as a journalist. In free-lance work there is even fiercer competition, more harrowing uncertainty. It is frightful, as I know, when one's indigestion is sluggish and one hasn't an idea in one's head, and the pursuit of an idea is an unsuccessful chase of a will-o'-the-wisp, leading to neurasthenic despair.

Those are the inevitable handicaps. Yet in spite of them, perhaps because of them, journalism is a great adventure for those who have an insatiable interest in human life, and a facility for interpretation. At the present time the British Press has lost much of its old prestige, and, indeed, I think that its reputation is at its lowest ebb. This is due, not to the working journalist, not to any degradation in the literary standard of journalism—there is better writing now in newspapers than at any time in the history of the Press—but to the political ambitions of proprietors who have used this enormous engine of public opinion for

propaganda instead of argument, and for the suppression or evasion of news which is contrary to their political interests. And the public has found them out. . . .

Mr. Michael Joseph's book is not concerned with that aspect of journalism. His work is a guidebook for the journalistic aspirant, and the advice and information he gives will be enormously helpful to young writers who are at present without any practical knowledge of the ways and means of the journalistic craft and find their talent frustrated owing to the lack of definite direction. It is, I believe, the first book of its kind, and the author has done a real service to journalism, and to its new recruits, by his admirable presentation of facts, giving all the rules of the game, with expert knowledge and advice.

PHILIP GIBBS.

## CHAPTER I

### JOURNALISM AS A CAREER

TRADITION dies hard. As a profession—although in most respects it is more of a trade than a profession—journalism is still popularly supposed to be a most precarious means of earning a livelihood. Fathers shake their heads dismally when their offspring express a desire to enter journalism. And, most significant of all, for some mysterious reason—which I hope to explain later—nearly every professional journalist does his best to discourage the ambitious youngster who wants to become a writer.

Now I know—and so does nearly everyone in Fleet Street—men who, despite the fact that they haven't a tenth part of the ability necessary to qualify as a doctor or lawyer, still contrive to make quite substantial incomes out of the so-called profession of journalism. One of the many fallacies associated with Fleet Street in the mind of the outside world is that journalism requires a high standard of education and ability. I wonder. Education, of course, may mean anything. Certainly purely academic training is no great advantage. The most successful journalists—among newspaper men at any rate—have rarely been distinguished as scholars. The

majority of London daily newspaper editors are not University men.

It is necessary, too, I think, to distinguish between brains and ability. Mere cleverness is no asset. The successful journalist must be a citizen of the world, capable of looking after himself, acting on his own initiative, with the ability to form judgments rapidly and shrewdly, to observe thoroughly and to act quickly. He must have tact, endurance both physical and mental, patience, confidence and determination. He must be prepared to be "all things to all men," assimilating, chameleon-like, the characteristics of the company in which his work places him. By turns he has to be frigidly well-bred, appropriately convivial, a "tough customer," talkative, reticent, forceful, diplomatic, patient and enterprising. A knowledge of human nature—only to be acquired, unfortunately, by experience—is far more valuable to him than a University degree. As a certain journalist-politician proudly used to say: "The world is my university."

Yet for some reason or other journalism undoubtedly attracts the "brainy" type of man. The man who is destined to become a great scientist, inventor, or statesman frequently cuts an inconspicuous figure at school. But the boy who can write usually reveals his ability at an early age, and this may be partly responsible for the idea that "clever" youngsters are cut out for success in journalism. But—and this is rather an important point—it doesn't follow that because a boy shows literary ability he is going to make a good journalist. There is much more in the writing game than just writing.

So many people fail at journalism that, quite unjustly,

it is called a precarious occupation. But is it ? Is it not the fault of those who try to practise it without the least qualification or understanding of its requirements ? Why should so many amateurs, in the inevitable loss of their enthusiasm, condemn journalism as uncertain and precarious ? It is not journalism's fault, but their own.

It is unfortunately true that there is still no recognised or approved training for the would-be writer. In spite of the establishment of a few commercial institutions which no doubt do excellent work despite the handicap of dealing with the majority of their pupils by correspondence, and of the lately created University of London Journalism Course, which, inevitably perhaps, is academic and hopelessly unpractical, the ambitious young writer has absolutely no guidance at all. In America journalism is regarded as an honourable profession (although we may think its dignity open to question), and men and women are prepared for it by sound, practical courses of instruction at many universities, notably the famous Colombia University Course. The English journalist has to "muddle through" on his own.

But, to be honest, I am not deploring the absence of any such approved course of journalistic training. The true journalist cannot be made at school or college. The only part of his equipment that can be created or improved is the ability to write. If you ask the average unthinking man or woman what is the primary qualification of a good journalist, the reply will probably be the ability *to write*. This of course is a fallacy. Literary ability comes last, not first. What is the use of being able to write if one hasn't the material to write about, or, what is more important, the training which enables one to secure the



material? General knowledge (alas, what criminal examination papers are perpetrated in thy name!) is not to be acquired from the study of books, nor from the lectures of professors. The hard knocks of experience are the only apprenticeship; and success in journalism depends, not on scholastic education, but on character. In no profession is there a better illustration of the "survival of the fittest" theory than in journalism.

Therefore, when journalism is discredited as a career, it is only fair to remember that many of its failures are men and women temperamentally unfitted for the job.

The youth who gets a job on the editorial staff of a paper, or even the optimistic amateur who deluges editors with manuscripts, may call himself a journalist. The other professions do not tolerate such participation in their professional dignity. In fact, to call yourself a lawyer, a doctor or a dentist without official status is to ask for trouble. The lamentations of the discouraged amateur or the disillusioned reporter are sufficiently numerous to draw repeated attention to the "precariousness" of journalism. The embryo doctor who gets "ploughed" doesn't complain of the hazards of a medical practice simply because he isn't allowed to experience them. The stage is the only profession I can think of where beginners may attach to themselves the dignity of the description actor or actress, with, of course, the same result. The stage is also branded as a "precarious" career. Thus the lack of authoritative status is responsible for the attraction to journalism's ranks of totally unsuitable candidates who would have been promptly weeded out by any qualifying examination.

That is why journalism is strictly not a profession at

all. It is a trade ; and " news," articles, etc., are its commodities. A tramp may be able to sell an editor something he wants. There can be no professional etiquette in the strenuous competition for the world's news and " stuff " for the reading public to feed on. It would be therefore unreasonable to complain of the lack of journalistic degrees or qualifications ; but this does to an extent account for the tradition that journalism is a hazardous and overcrowded profession.

" Journalism is never a life of easy toil and seldom one of rich rewards. I would not recommend it to youth as a primrose path," writes Sir Philip Gibbs in his *Adventures in Journalism*, " nor for anyone who wishes to play for safety in possession of an assured income, regular hours, and a happy home life. It is of uncertain tenure, because no man may hold on to his job if he weakens under the nervous strain, or quarrels on a point of honour with the proprietor who pays him or with the editor who sets his task. Nobody," he goes on to say, " has ever seen a retired reporter living on the proceeds of his past toil, like business men in other adventures of life.

" I have known the humiliation of journalism, its insecurity, its never-ending tax upon the mind and heart, its squalor, its fever, its soul-destroying machinery, for those who are not proof against its cruelties."

Why should the experienced and even successful journalist always so emphatically warn the eager young enthusiast of the pitfalls that await him ? I think it is that the very nature of his occupation sooner or later makes him something of a cynic. After facing possibly a lifetime of journalism's ups and downs, the innumerable hazards of the work, the caprices of proprietors, the

contact with so many unpleasant and disturbing aspects of life, the kaleidoscopic changes of newspaper life, and the disillusion and disappointments of not only journalists in particular but mankind in general, is it to be wondered at that the old hand warns the youngster that "the race is to the swift"?

Even the most successful journalist realises that in one respect his calling compares unfavourably with that of the newsagent who sells his wares. However hard he toils, however brilliant his work, the journalist builds up no "good will," no business into which he can put his son, and on the proceeds of which he can live at his ease later in life. When he can write no more he may receive a small pension—Fleet Street, despite increasing commercialism, is more humane than it used to be in this respect. But he has nothing to offer his children except advice. Another man who may not have worked so hard or so long, hands on a business which continues to provide a steady income long after his hand is removed from the helm; the journalist hands in his last article only to find that the paper to which he may have devoted his life is no more his than the day he began.

Most journalists ignore this, as they ignore other drawbacks and disappointments, and for the same reasons—to the man or woman with the itch to write no other life is possible. "We write because we must," might be the epitaph of any Fleet Street man. The queer attraction of the life and the fact that an able journalist can, without capital or expensive training, earn fifteen pounds in a five-day week, are enough to account for the ever-present supply of recruits.

Apart from the ordinary hazards of journalism itself,

it is, as I have pointed out, an overcrowded occupation. In the main it is a profession distinguished by mediocrity—sound mediocrity if you like, but still mediocrity. It may seem a paradox to mention “brilliant” men in the same paragraph, but the men who climb to the top of the ladder, although naturally in the limelight by reason of their work, are comparatively few. There is, in journalism particularly, plenty of room at the top. But the rank and file are busy feeding on the gingerbread from which the gilt of problematic fame has probably long since worn off—and are content to stick to their jobs—if they can. They are mediocrities—and most of them know it. There are glittering prizes to be won, but the bitter fight at the foot of the ladder often proves too much for the struggling journalist, and bread and butter, in the shape of a routine job, becomes his objective—not fame and reputation.

But the printing presses of Fleet Street—that generic term which has become synonymous with the whole profession of journalism—still cast their throbbing spell over imaginative young men, and women, too, in these days, and Fleet Street still beckons as potently as in the days of Dr. Johnson.

There is something extraordinarily magnetic about journalism. Seeing oneself in print is, I suppose, the fundamental attraction. It certainly has a thrill and a fascination altogether its own, and even hardened writers rejoice inwardly at each fresh appearance in print.—The distribution of the world's news, facts and fiction, which we call the press, is still a human novelty, and there is an odd sort of pleasure in being associated with it—at any rate in these days. The dignity of journalism is, of course, newly acquired; in Dickens' day the newspaper reporter

was a low fellow ; to-day he basks in the reflected glory of his proprietor's peerage and his editor's knighthood, perhaps even wondering whether he himself might not one day carry off an O.B.E. for some distinguished exploit.

It is not, of course, the enhanced prestige of journalism that attracts the young writer. It may be safely asserted that the love of writing for its own sake is primarily responsible. To many the adventurous life of the journalist (prosaic though it often proves to be in practice), with a spice of danger possibly, and a kaleidoscopic change of surroundings, undoubtedly makes a strong appeal. The glamour of the special correspondent's meteoric career, (for imagination easily promotes the enthusiastic aspirant to this rôle !) is a welcome contrast to the monotonous routine of other occupations.

To be a journalist ! What the name does not magically suggest ! Audiences with kings and emperors, the privilege of last interviews with condemned murderers, unlimited facilities for observing wars, demonstrations, accidents, crimes, weddings, funerals, opportunities to travel, see the world and its interesting people, and first-class expenses everywhere !

The glamour wears off soon enough. Journalism may be more of a magic carpet than an office stool—but it is rarely, if ever, a comfortable journey. There is more hard work, discomfort and nervous strain in journalism than the novice can possibly realise. If he is wise he faces the prospect with determination to win through. But many are broken on the wheel of Fleet Street.

It is not, however, either my wish or intention to discourage the would-be journalist. To anyone determined

to make journalism his career I can give at least one important satisfaction. I have yet to meet the journalist who would change his occupation for any other. Some of them can't manage to live in Fleet Street, but they find they can't live out of it, either.

The fascination of journalism cannot, therefore, be superficial. The work is hard, but it has compensations; the life is uncertain, but some temperaments thrive on it; luck plays an important part, but gambling appeals strongly to some natures. It is a great game, more of a game than ordinary business life where the melodrama of human existence only comes occasionally to the surface. It is a hard school, but success is all the sweeter when it comes.

One outstanding advantage which journalism offers is the opportunity to test your skill by "free-lancing." Without committing yourself to journalism as a career you may approach editors with your work at the expense of a couple of postage stamps. The majority of professional journalists do, indeed, begin in this way. An occasional early effort, printed and paid for—oh, the thrill of that first cheque!—is a tremendous encouragement.

The advantages of "free-lancing" are obvious. Articles, ideas, paragraphs—all may be manufactured in the writer's spare time, without affecting his ordinary occupation. Properly exploited and developed, "free-lance" work paves the way to journalism as a permanent career, frequently involving the willing sacrifice of an uncongenial occupation.

I don't mean that the growth of one's free-lance activities will, in the ordinary way, justify the throwing overboard of a permanent job, however uncongenial.

Very, very few men make a comfortable living out of free-lancing. For the majority it is usually a struggle to make ends meet. I solemnly warn the beginner against any idea of supporting himself by free-lancing alone. As a welcome addition to income, yes ; or as a means of ultimately securing a job in Fleet Street, yes ; as a sole means of livelihood, emphatically NO.

This is what the late Mr. Kennedy Jones, in his book *Fleet Street and Downing Street*, says of free-lance journalism " for a working journalist dependent on his pen for a livelihood " :

It is breaking a man on the wheel. For one article printed two are refused, others perhaps held back. In some offices trouble may ensue about payment : it is " forgotten " or " overlooked " and longer time may be occupied in collecting the money than in writing the article. The journalist who takes a pride in his work and realises the essence of it is to suit the taste of the moment, has his heart quickly broken if he allows himself to be tied to this wheel.

How may free-lancing lead to a regular journalistic job ? Let us suppose that the editor of a popular weekly accepts one or two of your articles. He may presently welcome a suggestion from you for a regular feature ; this may directly pave the way to an offer of a staff position. Or, as a result of a few accepted contributions, an editor may ask you to call, possibly to discuss a series of articles ; and an interview may lead to an editorial job.

Indeed, the reason why many attractive positions in editorial offices are rarely officially " vacant " is because many editors only consider an " outside " application if there is no contributor who has revealed his qualifications.

In Fleet Street there is little time to train untried beginners. Free-lancing enables the journalistic aspirant to demonstrate the value of his ideas and writing ability before crossing the editorial threshold.

There are, however, innumerable positions on the business side open to men who don't have to write themselves. Such non-creative jobs may not appeal to the youngster burning to express himself in print, but they form decidedly useful stepping-stones to editorial appointments. Better an office boy in an editor's room than nothing at all. After all, journalism is a big enterprise, and the innumerable openings which any business organisation affords should not be despised. The engineers responsible for printing machines, the advertisement manager and his canvassers who secure advertisements, the clerks in the counting house of a newspaper, the printer's readers, are in a sense all journalists.

"Some men take to ink," a famous journalist once wrote, "as others to drink. When one hears by what strange bypaths men enter journalism, one is inclined to adapt Shakespeare and to declare that as often as not we are journalists by heavenly compulsion, leader-writers, war correspondents, and paragraphists by spherical predominance, critics, reviewers, and verse writers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence."

In addition to the leading newspapers and periodicals there is, too, a large number of publications of which the man in the street has probably never heard. For the individual beginner there are usually more possibilities in these smaller papers and magazines. To gain experience there should be no hesitation about accepting a job, however undistinguished, on the staff of a comparatively



unknown paper. In fact it is better to make one's mistakes in a humble sphere ; for later in his career the journalist will discover the drastic truth that to make a single mistake often means the loss of a job.

The orthodox preparation for entering London journalism is a period of service on the staff of a provincial paper. The provincial press reaches such a high standard of excellence in this country that it is surprising to find Fleet Street the Mecca of ninety-nine journalists in a hundred. Many of the country newspapers are equal, if not superior to, their London rivals. I am tempted to mention names, but comparisons are proverbially odious.

Frequently, however, a provincial appointment is the graveyard of journalistic ambitions. The young journalist whose eyes are fixed on Fleet Street often finds the vision fading slowly but surely away, and presently discovers that he is in a groove and can't get out. On the other hand, many a promising young journalist has made good by graduating in this way, serving his apprenticeship in the provinces and thereby gaining invaluable experience. You may be sure that any advertisement requiring the services of " an experienced reporter or sub-editor " for a London paper is eagerly scanned and as promptly applied for, from all over the provinces.

This is all very well, I can hear the would-be journalist saying, but how am I to get a job, even any sort of journalistic job ?

Well, how does one ever get a job ? Journalism in this respect is no different from any other occupation. Apart from previous experience, the qualifications are straightforward enough. First, enthusiasm for the work ;

second, willingness to begin at the beginning, both in point of duties and remuneration. Many a successful journalist has begun by sticking on postage stamps and running errands for a few shillings a week. In fact, such humble beginnings may be the only alternative to the possession of either influence or capital.

A good many hard things have been said about influence. That kissing goes by favour there can be no doubt. But although influence may put a man in a good position he usually has to prove his ability in order to keep it. But if any would-be journalist came to me and I found he had friends at court, I should unhesitatingly advise him to pull strings as hard as he could. The morality of such advice may be doubtful, but as I have said before, journalism makes cynics of all its followers.

Capital is not of much assistance, except in securing freedom from worry in the early stages of a career and a comfortable feeling of additional security afterwards. I have heard it said that when a would-be journalist has bought a typewriter, a ream of paper, fountain pen and a book of postage stamps, he has got as near to journalistic success as money can take him. There is some truth in this. The apprentice system, under which one became a "pupil" in an editorial office for a consideration of a few hundred pounds, was never popular in journalism. To-day, apprenticeships available on such terms are rarely worth having. In most offices the premium system is unknown; certainly anyone with the makings of a journalist in him has no need to pay a premium to learn journalism. In the last fifteen years, indeed, I have not heard of a single instance of a premium being asked in any editorial office worth entering, that is, where the beginner

would receive the thorough grounding in newspaper or magazine work which is alone worth anything in the long run. Some established free-lance writers and authors take "pupils" and teach them the ropes. That is different and legitimate enough. In fact, several men who are to-day firmly established as free-lance pressmen in receipt of comfortable incomes, began in this way. But the author and journalist has more time than is usually available in an editorial office, where "passengers" are not wanted and the small saving on the salary list arising from taking an apprentice is not worth consideration.

As a guide to the salaries paid to competent beginners, on the other hand, the scale laid down by one of the largest Fleet Street firms provides for a minimum salary of £2 at eighteen years of age, rising to 45/- at nineteen; 55/- at twenty, and 65/- at twenty-one, thereafter rising according to ability.

On a large scale capital is positively dangerous to the journalistic newcomer. Human nature being what it is, the wealthy aspirant to literary honours is usually persuaded by a judicious mixture of flattery and inviting propositions, to take a proprietorial interest in some publication or other. Such investments frequently prove fatal, for obvious reasons. Algernon Blackwood has said: "Let any emigrant young Englishman *earn his own living for at least five years* in any colony before a penny of capital is given him to invest." The italics are mine and are, I hope, eloquent.

However, the problem of what to do or what not to do with a large sum of money so rarely affects the average beginner that we need not dwell on the point.

The best case to take is that of the youngster without

money, without influence, and without experience. The last is so valuable that I strongly recommend anyone anxious to succeed as a journalist not to neglect any opportunity to gain it, even if it seems working very hard for trifling remuneration, or even for none at all. It is the way of all employers—even the most intelligent—to ask : “ What experience have you had ? ”

There is only one way to get a job—and that is to ask for it. One small point which may be usefully remembered by the youngster applying for a job is this. Don't forget that your letter of application is more than a request for an ordinary job. It is a request for a *writing* job. Therefore it should be well written. Don't let it be a stereotyped formula. Try to express *yourself* in it. Don't write an eccentric letter, but an individual letter ; a letter with character, brief and to the point (the cardinal virtue of modern journalism), but the kind of letter which is somehow just *different* from the average communication of its kind.

Journalism is a democratic trade, with the many advantages and disadvantages of democracy. The advantages easily outweigh the disadvantages. A man is judged by what he writes, not by what he thinks, or says, or does, nor by his antecedents or personal appearance. Not that personal appearance isn't important. It is. The good journalist with a pride in his calling has the right and the obligation to dress well. There is no need to enlarge on the precise meaning of the phrase “ to dress well.” Either a man knows how to dress appropriately, or not. But it is very important. Only the wealthy can afford to dress shabbily. Be poor if you must, but don't look poor.

This applies obviously to the professional journalist, more particularly to the man who is going to graduate as a reporter or interviewer.

The conditions governing journalism have changed enormously in the last twenty years. With the advent of the "new journalism"—inaugurated by Alfred Harmsworth (the late Lord Northcliffe) in the *Daily Mail*, a new generation of journalists has sprung into being. The old poverty-stricken, disreputable journalist has disappeared. The professional journalist is now either an experienced publicist or one of those alert and versatile young men (Northcliffe's "bright young men" have become a by-word in Fleet Street) who can produce the sparkling tabloid news, the crisp breezy articles or the sensational Sunday paper "stunts" which are now a common feature of modern journalism.

The day of serious, dignified journalism is not, however, yet done away with, nor will it ever be. *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *Sunday Times* and *Observer*, of the London newspapers, are loyal to the old tradition. But the young man or woman entering Fleet Street should realise that there is an ever-widening gulf between the old journalism and the new. It is rather an important point. There is to-day a fundamental difference in newspaper styles, and the man who is temperamentally fitted for service with, let us say, the *Star*, may be out of his element altogether on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*. The new journalism—about which I express no opinion—has come to stay, and the difference between its treatment of news, for instance, and that of the staid journals is well illustrated by the following extract from the *London Evening News* :

A Wimbledon Park listening-in "fan" who cannot listen-in any longer has got Scotland Yard to send out a merely ordinary police S.O.S. on his behalf.

Someone rang him up on his prosaic telephone the other day, and, listening, he heard them say: "Inspectors of the British Broadcasting Company speaking," or words to that effect. They wanted to see his wireless set.

They came—two nice young men—and saw it.

They said it was all wrong: they went away—with it.

And they were not inspectors of the B.B.C.

The difference between this and reports of the same incident in, say, the *Daily Telegraph*, or *The Times* is illuminating.

Many aspects of journalism may not appeal to the newcomer. Some of the duties which the junior reporter has to perform, writing up a Council meeting, bazaar, or a local flower show, for instance, may strike the hesitating aspirant as being dull hack work. But, as Robert Lynd has wisely pointed out, "No man should become a journalist who is not capable of putting his best work into what seems to him mere hack work."

The journalist must not only enjoy his trade, but learn it.

"A good tinker," says "The Londoner" in the *Evening News*, "a master of his trade, should have the skill to mend any fashion of kettle or saucepan. The least that we may ask of a tailor is that he should be able to cut us a coat and waistcoat and trousers. A journalist also must learn the trade of journalism. His business may be put into plain words. The good journalist ought to know all about everything: there is no bit of knowledge that will not come in handily one of the days when he sits at his work. That is why journalism is, in its way, no easier a livelihood than tinkering or tailoring."

If only the young writer would get down to brass tacks, regarding journalism not as a gratifying hobby or a short cut to literary glory, but as a means of earning his living, it would not take him very long to realise that there are a hundred and one directions, some of them unpromising enough on the surface, in which money can be made. Idealism is all very well ; but the young journalist who lives with his head in the clouds is probably going to come to grief if he tries at the same time to make material progress.

At this point, therefore, I may appropriately point out that the main object of this survey is to indicate the material prospects of journalism, first as a career, then as an independent ("free-lance") occupation. My omission of any reference to the historical development of journalism, to the influence or power of the press, or of any tribute to its newly-acquired importance, is due to a determination to keep to the point, for the benefit (I hope) of *the young writer*. I fear I shall not inspire anyone with lofty thoughts of the honour or romance of the profession ; if I do it will be accidental. I propose to regard journalism as a trade ; and to show how to make money out of it.

In this and the next chapter the career of the *professional* journalist engages our attention. Subsequent chapters deal with "free-lance" work ; but as most regular journalists (except those specifically bound by contract, not to do so) engage in a varying amount of "free-lancing," I hope that the book will prove of practical service to both classes. But it is, I think, necessary at this point to draw the distinction between the man to whom journalism is his daily employment and the man who "free-lances" in his own time.

Let us take first the case of the would-be professional journalist.

The magnet which draws young men to Fleet Street is made up, not of one attraction, but several. Many recruits to journalism see in newspaper work the opportunity of well-paid and congenial work; of that indefinable thing called status. In short, they weigh up their chances in journalism with their chances in some other profession and decide that perhaps after all it is better to deal in news than in law, medicine, or soap.

Another class attracted to journalism is the young man in search of romance and adventure.

The prospects of interviewing the Premier in the morning, attending a luncheon at the "Savoy" or "Ritz" at midday, to watch a defaulting financier's face as he is sentenced at the Old Bailey in the afternoon, and visit a West End theatre as the welcome guest of the management in the evening, is, of course, attractive. And this is only a slightly exaggerated version of a popular idea of a journalist's daily round.

Actually, of course, journalism is to-day a thing of machinery, every newspaper a mighty organisation in which every member of the staff is only a cog. And however useful the printing press may be, no one will accuse cold steel and iron of being romantic. Twenty years ago the description might have fitted Fleet Street; to-day the gospel of the strenuous life has ousted the last remnants of the easy pace of former days and we are gradually drifting nearer and nearer to the state of things in the United States where newspapers and magazines are pamphlets issued by financiers or politicians, not for



the sake of spreading news so much as to broadcast views.

Yet another type of person who turns to journalism is the young man or woman who "must write"—who suffers from that curious but insistent impulse which causes them to set their thoughts down in writing, whether there is any hope of what they write ever being published or not.

These are the true journalists, the worthy successors, in however humble a sphere, of Delane of *The Times*, John Walter, Northcliffe, and the long line of distinguished men who, in the hour of their fame, have not been ashamed to call themselves by the plain word "journalist."

Watch a youngster experiencing his first glimpse of a great daily newspaper "being put to bed" and the journalist will tell you what that young man's chances are in Fleet Street. Education plus imagination many people will tell you are the essential qualifications needed by every embryo journalist. I would add another—enthusiasm. Success in journalism needs twenty-five per cent. ability and enterprise and seventy-five per cent. enthusiasm. Unless the young reporter lives for his paper before all else in the world he is on the wrong track. If he can watch those great printing presses, as large as the average room and larger than many, sucking in miles of paper at one end and throwing it out at the other, transformed into twenty thousand printed and counted newspapers every hour, without a thrill of romance stirring his heart, then he would be advised to seek some more prosaic and less exacting profession than journalism, with its hardships, disappointments, scanty rewards, uncertainties, and precarious conditions which are all it gives to many of

its loyal and experienced workers. "Hanging on to prosperity by the eyelids" is how one writer expressed the fate of the average journalist, and the phrase gives a very fair idea of what Fate holds in store for the newcomer into Fleet Street, at least during the first few years of his professional career.

I do not mean to suggest that a young man must, to succeed as a journalist, be filled with enthusiasm and awe for the ways of the modern press before he reaches Fleet Street. If he is it may be taken as a good sign. One of the greatest journalists of to-day once told me that for months before he got his first chance in journalism he used to spend sixpence nearly every fine Sunday on riding up to Blackfriars from his home in the suburbs and walk up and down Fleet Street, familiarising himself with the position of the offices of each newspaper, ready for the day when he would be part of the press. "It used to thrill me," he said, "to think that perhaps the few men I passed in Fleet Street on a quiet Sunday afternoon were journalists hastening to work on Monday's paper—men whose names I had seen in those pages of print which exercised such a spell over my imagination."

To-day his friends in the profession speak of that man as "a born journalist." Certainly his enthusiasm has never abated. He will still work at his desk long after he might be at home by his fireside, and if you tell him that journalism is a precarious profession, he will reply that like every other job on earth it needs the right sort of brains and temperament—that it is neither more nor less secure than a hundred other careers he can name. He is one of the men Rudyard Kipling must have had in his mind when he wrote :

" Who's lit his pipe in the morning calm  
That follows the midnight stress,  
He hath sold his heart to the Old Black Art  
We call the daily Press."

It is opportunities of success that exist to-day, however, that count. What, then, are the prospects for a young man of average, not necessarily University, education who decides that for good or ill he will adopt journalism as a career? What qualifications should he possess and how should he proceed so that they may be used to the best advantage?

## CHAPTER II

### A JOURNALIST'S PROGRESS

LET us follow the career of a typical young man whose ambition is to find a niche in Fleet Street where he can satisfy his desire to write. He is twenty years of age, possesses good appearance, an average education, no friends in high places, very little capital, but boundless enthusiasm.

His first effort, let us say, was a youthful contribution to his school magazine, but ever since he has been writing on subjects which seemed to him to be worth writing about. After leaving school he studied English literature, composition, shorthand, typewriting and languages at home in the hope that one day his chance would come to be a journalist. He read widely, realising the importance of studying other people's successful efforts.

For several months he regularly submitted his work to editors, who as regularly returned it to him with the usual rejection slip. Naturally he was tremendously discouraged at first. But sometimes a note would be added, indicating where the article had failed, and to these notes he gave careful attention. The medicine proved beneficial. There came a day when he wrote an article which was accepted. A month later it actually

appeared in print, and he was able to experience the exquisite thrill of reading what he had written in print for the first time.

From that moment he was to all intents and purposes a journalist. All thoughts of any other career were banished by the blinding revelation that not only could he write but—ininitely more important—he could sell what he wrote. Beside that tremendous fact nothing else mattered.

Fortunately for himself he was a level-headed young man. He knew that there are forty thousand men and women earning a living in Great Britain at writing, and another two hundred thousand trying to, so before throwing up his job as a clerk and buying a ticket to London, he sat down and tried, as far as his enthusiasm would let him, to see which side his bread was buttered. For, having decided to become a journalist, a relatively simple matter, as anyone can call himself by that name, he had to face the question: "How am I to do it?"

Reviewing the circumstances under which he had sold his first article, it struck him that it had been an article on a subject about which he had first-hand knowledge. Because he knew what he was writing about he had written more convincingly. It was clear, therefore, that to sell enough articles to earn a living, he would have to know quite a lot about a great number of subjects, and the only practical way to gain this knowledge was while being paid to do so by a paper. A certain amount of useful knowledge may be gained from books, and many articles in the so-called popular weekly periodicals of to-day are really facts from books and articles

previously published, which have been tabulated and brought up to date by journalists, but generally speaking a year's practical experience of newspaper life is worth more to a budding writer than all the book-knowledge in the British Museum. Train the mind to see a story in everything and it will begin to store up useful facts without conscious effort.

In spite of the first-hand knowledge which he had put into the article, however, he noticed that it had been considerably sub-edited before being published. Here was proof positive that, after writing an article on a subject with which he was fully conversant, with a special market in view, his article had, nevertheless, needed careful changes and cutting before it met the requirements of the paper. He compared the copy he had kept of the article in its original form with the published version, and noted how much more crisply it read, how superfluous words had been ruthlessly cut away, and the whole article made altogether more readable. These alterations, made by the sub-editor who prepared the article for press, were changes of style and form only, but there is real art in compression and readability—and the young man was wise enough to realise it.

It was, of course, possible for him to become a "freelance" and attempt to make a living by writing articles without being attached to any paper. But to do this with any hope of success it was vital that he should know exactly the type of article and news story that each paper was looking for, and where to find it. Because one editor had been sufficiently impressed by a short contribution to employ a trained sub-editor for one hour in

so changing it that it was made suitable for publication, it would obviously have been absurd to assume that every other editor would be equally considerate.

Therefore the wisest course was, if and when an opportunity offered, to secure a junior position on the editorial department of a newspaper, and learn by actual experience what is a good "story" and what is not. Besides, this young man was an enthusiast, and no enthusiast considers that he has "crossed the line" which separates the craft of journalism from the rest of the world until he has watched the news messages from all parts of the world streaming out of the ticking tape-machines in the news room, to leave the building an hour or so later—perhaps only thirty minutes later—in the form of tomorrow's newspaper.

In deciding on actual experience at all costs he was adopting what is undoubtedly the best course for the young literary aspirant to follow. If journalism is an overcrowded profession, the occupation known as "writing for the press" is even more jammed—mostly with those who are deficient in that knowledge of the elementary principles of journalism without which success is impossible.

The press of this country, taken as a whole, will compare favourably with any nation in the world for integrity, enterprise, scope and reputation. The prizes are there all right. They are the sort of prizes that tempt young, ambitious men and women. In no other walk of life can a competent man earn a four-figure salary as easily as in journalism. Many men at the top of the tree enjoy the salaries and prestige of Prime Ministers. Of course, there is the other side of the picture. Many

skilled journalists, especially in the provinces, never get beyond a wage of £8 or £10 a week. Competition—more ruthless than in any other career on earth—carries other men over their heads every time. In journalism the natural law is the survival of the fittest. All the more reason for the newcomer to make certain that he is one of the fittest. In every newspaper office it is not a question of deciding between a good article or a bad article ; or a good assistant or a bad one ; it is a question of deciding which of two or more articles or men is the best for the immediate purpose. And the article or man that needs much changing doesn't stand much chance. If your contribution, whether it be special article, news story, or football report, isn't just what is wanted, be sure someone else will see the chance and take it. The newspaper " war " is always going on—it is the struggle every journalist, whether free-lance or staff man, must face to beat his competitors and thus secure a " scoop." Speed is everything—there is no eight-hour day when you are flying with exclusive photographs of an earthquake from one side of the world to another, and there is no chance of rectifying a slip in your copy, when, ten minutes after leaving your hands, the papers containing the story, and possibly landing your editor with a libel action, are being bundled into the newspaper trains bound for every part of the kingdom.

Having decided to look for a position on the staff of a newspaper, the young man made his second discovery. That was that it was a very much more difficult thing to secure a post on a London newspaper than it was, say, twenty years ago. Then it was usually possible, with patience, to find an editor who was prepared to offer the



untrained youngster a seat in the office and a pound or two a week while he was gaining experience. It meant work at all hours, meals snatched between pasting up copy, or writing up a murder report, hunting for news all day, and only finding four lines as a result in the paper next morning, perhaps not that. It meant being elbowed out of the way when trying to get a "story" outside by more experienced reporters, and being elbowed out of the way by irate news editors or suspicious sub-editors who feared you were after their job within. It was a hard school of the "make or break" variety, in which every man was expected to be competent to turn his hand to anything that went into the paper—news, politics, gardening notes, police court reports. You learned how to write about them all in emergency, and to make what you wrote convincing. You learned to write at all hours—to work the clock round, and to beat the clock by writing for dear life, while printers' boys stood at your elbow to snatch up every page and dash off with it to the waiting compositors.

In a word, the recruit who came to Fleet Street twenty years ago got priceless experience, and if he had the divine spark of journalism anywhere in his make-up, the news editor saw that it was not overlooked.

To-day all that is changed, and it is infinitely harder for the untrained or partially-trained man, unless he possesses that mysterious thing we call "influence," to secure an editorial position on a London daily newspaper. Instead, he is forced to spend years on a provincial newspaper, obtaining his experience where the scope is more restricted, and keeping his weather eye on the "Situations Vacant—Journalists" column of *The Times*, in

the hope that one day his chance to reach the Mecca of journalism will come.

Twenty years ago there was no sort of standard wage for journalists. They were sometimes overpaid, and sometimes underpaid—mostly perhaps naturally, underpaid. Then the National Union of Journalists was formed to look after the interests of the working journalists. The N.U.J. represents the great majority of working journalists in the country. It is the only journalistic body recognised by the newspaper proprietors' organisations for the negotiation of agreements on salaries and conditions. It has established a minimum wage of nine guineas a week on London daily and Sunday newspapers, and a rate varying between five and six pounds a week on provincial dailies. There can be no doubt that this minimum wage has enormously improved the position and prospects of many thousands of journalists. Unfortunately it has had an unexpected effect in restricting the chances of the untrained journalistic recruits, at least, so far as Fleet Street itself is concerned. Nor is the reason far to seek. An editor cannot teach journalism and pay a salary of nine guineas a week while he is doing it. It is true that a "skilled journalist" under the minimum wage agreement means a person with at least three years' work as a journalist to his credit, but three years is all too short to become really experienced and efficient, and who can blame an editor if, in seeking a new assistant, with the knowledge that in any case he must pay the relatively high salary of nine guineas a week, he selects the applicant with ten years' experience rather than the one with three? The result often is that the newcomer is forced to put in many years in the provinces before he achieves

the ambition of every true journalist and takes his place among the exalted ones of Fleet Street.

So far as actual routine and opportunities for "learning the ropes" are concerned, however, the gap between Fleet Street and the provinces has been steadily narrowing during recent years. There have always been appointments in cities like Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham as good as any in London. And now, with many of the provincial morning and evening papers organised and directed from Fleet Street, contact between the provinces and London is closer than ever, and the promising beginner in Newcastle or Cardiff is as likely to get promotion as he would be in London. The links which bind the provinces to London, however, have standardised a large part of the press on the London pattern. The syndication of special features—signed articles, book reviews, sport, etc.—in "strings" of papers, is a growing practice which has followed naturally on amalgamations, with consequently less scope for the journalist on the spot, who finds himself, so far as a part of his paper is concerned, a mere surveyor of matter delivered "ready to print," chosen, written, and sub-edited by someone in a London office.

Although this development has undoubtedly restricted opportunities open to those who work in provincial offices, the infusion of Fleet Street technique has certainly done much to raise the general standard. Naturally, when a minor provincial daily receives syndicated book reviews written by a famous journalist in London, and circulated to a dozen papers, the quality of those reviews is higher than the paper could afford to pay for if it stood alone as a single unit. In the United States this fact was

realised years ago—hence the almost universal use of syndicated features (as distinct from news). In Britain, syndication is still in its infancy, but it is performing an increasingly important function, and will almost certainly develop. The embryo journalist should bear this fact in mind—it means that in the future the bulk of the specialised features in our newspapers will be commissioned by headquarters in London, and not, as hitherto, in the provinces.

There remain the purely “local” papers, at present still mostly independent. An opportunity to serve on one of these should not be dismissed without good reason. They provide an excellent “nursery” in which a young journalist can often obtain more easily than anywhere else an all-round training. Being small they are not usually departmentalised, as are the larger newspapers, and the beginner who has no extravagant ideas about salary can learn the rudiments of sub-editing, reporting, leader-writing, feature-work, and putting a paper to press—tasks which on a London daily are performed by five different specialists.

This specialisation is the keynote of Fleet Street. Many sub-editors handle only one sort of copy, and are experts in their particular news departments. Thus there are foreign sub-editors, sport sub-editors, police court and crime sub-editors, and so on. This applies also to news gatherers. On all but the largest papers in the provinces the reporters are expected to undertake whatever comes along, whereas on most of the great London dailies “special correspondents” are employed, who confine their knowledge and skill to one particular branch of news. Thus there are “diplomatic

correspondents," "sporting writers," "crime writers," "parliamentary correspondents," and so forth.

We will assume, however, that the young man whose fortunes we are following has been lucky enough to obtain a junior position on the staff of a London daily newspaper at a salary of £4 a week. He will, thanks to the improved conditions, have escaped the anguish and brain-fag of the old "penny-a-liner" days, when new recruits were "attached" to a paper without salary, and paid, if not literally one penny a line, very poorly indeed for all their "copy" which escaped the blue pencil of the diligent sub-editor and saw the light of day in the paper. But he will still be faced with the same desperate necessity of learning how to write in the only way that counts on a modern newspaper.

If any man believes that journalists are born and not made, I recommend him to seek the views of any news editor on a great paper on the point. The vital spark—the will to write and the imagination to grasp the possibilities of a story—must be there.

But having succeeded in developing these, the new recruit will find that there is a lot more in journalism than meets the eye. And the rest of his education will be completed amid the rush of press-day, which means an end to carefully rounded phrases and polished periods, unless these can be dashed off at top-speed. I often wonder if the people who write to editors pointing out that "the" has been spelt "thee," or some similar typographical error that has crept into the paper, ever realise that the news story in question was probably dictated by a reporter at Brighton or Birmingham to a sub-editor in London, re-written and corrected, titled,



"To save time is to lengthen life," and the man whose minutes when they are desperately needed mainly lengthen the life of a keen young journalist. His first paper.

The effect of this race for the news will be that thanks to crawls into bed after his first day on the staff of a new paper, the young recruit will experience the sensation new having been hard at work for a month. Since eating lunch and breakfast, he will, if his has been an average day, have indeed invited ten famous men to express their views on the bill of Prime Minister's salary or some similar topic of the moment. He interviewed an impecunious and garrulous inventor of his discovery of a folding aeroplane or automatic safety device for bicycles, listened to a lecture on factory conditions in Japan, and written up a thousand words on the subject, hurried from this appointment to a hospital to get details of the injured in a train accident, and finally—at eight o'clock that night—sacrificed the hope of a quod dinner in order to attend a by-election meeting in a distant suburb, and write up half a column about the new Conservative candidate's speech.

In the copy of the paper he secures before going home he will probably find ten lines on factory conditions in Japan, a quarter-column, or "stick and a half" printed measure, on the by-election. Twenty-eight lines often out of two thousand words or more, what does it mean? Has he failed? Is the stuff no good? Surely the publisher won't go on paying him just for the pleasure of throwing what he writes into the waste-paper basket!

He needn't worry, however, for it is quite possible that his copy was all that was expected of him. It is the news editor's job to play for safety. He cannot let

set up in type for an event go in case there should be an unexpected story in it. So he "covers" it by sending along a reporter. If the copy is dull, it goes into the paper basket. If someone tries to break up the newspaper or the building catches fire, it is a "story" and goes into the paper. In either case the news editor is satisfied. He has taken no risks. In the same way he must be sure that he has sufficient copy to fill his paper in time for the first edition, with something over for accidents.

The compositor may drop a column of type two minutes before press time. There is no time left to re-set it for the next edition, so something else must be rushed in to fill the gap. A news editor must therefore have something in stock—for preference, something which will do as well to-morrow, or a week to-morrow, as to-day. So the young man's symposium of what ten business men think about the Prime Minister's salary goes to "stock"—to-morrow it is crowded out by three unexpected stories—a murder and two bad accidents—to-morrow may be quiet," and then it will come in handy.

In addition to these little things, he will probably have been accorded the privilege of a newcomer to look at the mighty machines that turn the streams of stories and articles into newspapers, ready for to-morrow's breakfast-table.

The staff employed in London and Manchester by Associated Newspapers, Ltd., which produce the *Daily Evening News* and *Sunday Dispatch*, numbers 100 people. The machinery installed in the press rooms in London and Manchester has a running capacity of 2,848,000 sixteen-page papers an hour. Two thousand pounds worth of black news ink, fifty-two tons of



coloured inks, and 140,000 tons of paper are used annually in the production of the three newspapers.

Editorial work—the collection and presentation of news, literary contents and pictures—costs about £6,500 a week. The payments to outside contributors, writers and artists average £1,400 a week. A single photograph or a single article may cost a hundred pounds or more.

An indication of the vast quantities of material used, may be gathered from the few annual figures which follow :

|                     |    |    |    |    |    |               |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|---------------|
| Coal                | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 8,500 cwts.   |
| Coke                | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 12,600 cwts.  |
| Fuel oil            | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 425 tons      |
| Foundry Gas         | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 98,052 therms |
| Cleaning Paraffin   |    | .. | .. | .. | .. | 8,768 gallons |
| String              | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 338 tons      |
| Electric Lamps      | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 15,000        |
| Photographic plates | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 35,000        |
| Photographic paper  | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 96,000 sheets |

The correspondence department handles a post of from 6,000 to 10,000 letters a day. The competitions department may have to deal with as many as 350,000 letters a week ; most of these arrive on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Having glimpsed some of the mechanical wonders of the modern newspaper, tried to make his puny voice heard above the roar of the machines, seen what he had written being printed in letters of molten lead in the foundry high above the street by brawny foundry-men belonging to the closest trade union in the land, and recruited solely from the sons of fathers, the newcomer

will in all probability feel surer than ever that he has indeed

"sold his heart to the Old Black Art."

His enthusiasm will grow with his knowledge and the day's work will be all too brief in view of the never-ending miracle of those hundreds of thousands of people he has never seen who will be reading what he has written the next morning.

In time he will probably be given a chance at descriptive writing. He will be asked to write up a two-column impression of an Abbey ceremony, or some big procession, or perhaps a speech for which the whole nation is waiting.

If he is wise, by the time he reaches this stage, which may be in six months or six years, in an office where promotion is strictly according to merit and merit alone, he will take care to become fully conversant with the topic before the event takes place, and thus save valuable time when every minute counts.

It may be that his first important assignment will be the visit of some foreign monarch to London. The news editor will give the reporter selected to "cover" the event the police permit usually issued in such cases, and which will carry him through the police cordons and on to the arrival platform at the railway station.

There he will join the other newspaper men and watch the arrival of the members of the Royal Family, and the Government and Diplomatic Service who await the distinguished visitors. Some of those present will, of course, be known to him, and in the case of the others, he will find that the older pressmen present know them all by

name. That is one of the little secrets of professional newsgathering at all fashionable functions, to know every important person present by sight.

While he is in the station, however, the reporter cannot see what is happening among the crowds outside, yet he must write up both aspects of the event as soon as it is over. How does he do it? In the first place he is by now conversant with the general details that apply to all big public events in London—the good-natured police, well-conducted crowds, the hawkers and other familiar features of such occasions. Then by the time he gets back to the office, he finds that all the reports which have been received from the news agencies and over the tape machines have been put on one side for him. By reading these reports through, he can see exactly what has occurred at all points of the visitors' drive through the streets.

From his own notes of the scene inside the station and these reports he must write up the 2,000-word pen-picture which will say everything worth saying about the event, for the benefit of those who did not see it. It is probable that he will only have an hour or a little over in which to complete his task in time for the first edition, wherein lies the value of the skeleton notes which I have mentioned. With the aid of this skeleton of the probable story made the day before, he can fill in the gaps at breakneck speed and have the satisfaction of seeing his name over a full report in the first copies of the paper off the machines.

Even then, however, his work is not over, for directly the proofs come down from the composing room, he must settle down to go over the whole story again, correcting

and altering it where necessary, cutting out faulty phrases and grammatical errors which have crept in in the rush. Only when this is done and the story has assumed final form can he think of himself—and food.

Up to this point the newcomer has been engaged in "chasing" ideas given him by the news editor. In other words he has been a reporter. The time has now arrived when he is given a seat at the sub-editor's table and initiated into the mysteries of "subbing."

The ideal news editor needs an encyclopædic knowledge of every subject under the sun, including the peerage, the laws of Britain, medicine, foreign politics, science and discovery. He also needs some years of experience at cutting up neat copy and turning it into usable news stories—often a very different thing. And in addition to these things he must possess a happy knack of knowing just the best way to get confirmation or contradiction of a doubtful piece of news without waste of time. If the news is untrue, it may cost his proprietors £5,000 in damages. If he throws it away, and it is true, his competitors may steal a march on him by printing it.

I could fill this volume with stories of news editors who, often after midnight, when the rest of the world is asleep, have been faced with this problem, from the cases of premature obituary notices, which were proved to be false by the arrival of a writ for libel from the "dead" man's solicitors, to the case of a mistake in the caption under a photograph which, by crediting a certain unmarried actress with the possession of the youngster who stood beside her when the picture was taken, cost a north of England newspaper £500.

Time and time again, the only thing which stands

between the newspaper and a possible damaging lawsuit, is the quick decision of the news editor taken after midnight, when there is no one he can turn to for assistance, and he must rely on his own knowledge and common sense. Can it be wondered at that mistakes do occur?

For the time being, however, the young man will not have to worry about these things. If the office in which he is making his plunge into journalism is an average newspaper office he will have enough to do in his own sphere to keep him busy.

Apart from the technicalities of "subbing," or, in other words, of turning out to pattern "copy" from a hundred different sources at a steady column and a half an hour—the recognised speed limit of the experienced sub-editor engaged on ordinary news—the "sub's" time is principally spent in trying to crowd a quart into a pint pot. How many times have I seen a reporter roundly declaring that his story must have a column or nothing if it is not to be ruined, while actually, all unknown to him, some hardened "sub" has already operated on it with a blue pencil, and sent it up to the composing room—a quarter of a column of compressed facts.

It is probable that hitherto the new sub-editor will have secretly hated the men "on the news desk" who "cut" his copy to smithereens day after day with unfailing regularity, or so it seemed to him, at the bidding of a heartless news editor. But closer acquaintance with the inside work of a newspaper will reveal to him the facts that this ruthless "pruning" is done impartially all round. Very few writers escape it. It arises from the fact that the news editor has only so many columns

in which to crowd at least a *résumé* of every scrap of important information which reaches him by telegram, telegraph, telephone, post and special reports, during the day.

The newcomer to the "sub's" room will also be surprised to find that there are so many things which an apparently slap-dash sub-editor must not do, and words which he must not use. It would be futile to attempt to give any list of these things which are "verboten," because they are never alike in any two newspaper offices. They represent the whims of either the directors or the editor, and often vary from month to month in the same office. For instance in one great Fleet Street office the word "England" must never be used. "Britain" is to be used instead on every occasion. In the same way the word "Colony" is strictly and quite rightly barred when it is a Dominion which is referred to. "Aeroplane" is prohibited by one important newspaper group which insists on the use of "airplane."

The "orders as to style" issued by one daily newspaper to its sub-editors include the following instructions :

Make dates always read with the month first, and add "st," "nd," etc., to numerals—as March 1st, not 1st March or March 1.

The hyphen should be used in such words as good-morning, to-morrow, by-and-by, one-and-sixpence, half-crown, fellow-men, a-going, half-way, but half an inch, half a dozen, one and a half, etc., take no hyphen.

All words with the affix "room" or "time" take the hyphen, as bath-room, sitting-room, tea-time, dinner-time.

The names of ships, public-houses, and mansions need not be quoted ; but plays, books, songs or poems should be quoted.

When "then" is used as a conjunction to connect two

related expressions, it should be preceded by a comma, as "if you know that your object is good, then boldly seek it."

The following and similar words take a comma after them when they commence a sentence: again, finally, besides, indeed, accordingly.

Do not use the word "char-à-banc." "Motor-coach" is more British and easier to understand. In the same way avoid using foreign words wherever an English substitute possessing substantially the same meaning is available.

By way of paradox the newcomer will find news editors and those who work under them the most cynical and blasé band of workers in the world. This is said in no unkind spirit. It is probably inevitable in a collection of skilled workers whose raw materials consist of joys and sorrows, coronations and coroners' inquests, dinners and death, concerts and catastrophes—the news men deal with them all as a part of the day's work. They have no illusions about life. The reporter and sub-editor on a great national newspaper see it in all its moods, grave and gay. The former is often the first to interview both the bride of the week and the sobbing widow whose husband hanged himself in the scullery two hours before. The latter writes obituary notices, both of the earl and of the hawker who is knocked down by a motor bus.

Can it be wondered that they have no illusions, and that sometimes to those who do not live in their whirlwind world they may even appear a little callous and indifferent?

"Brown," says the news editor to a reporter, putting down a "tape" message just brought to his table, "here's a fellow who says he's going to found a new religion. He's probably crazy, but you'd better go and ask him

what's the matter with the old ones, just in case he's worth a story."

Perhaps a speech is made by a famous man. He has been studying for this great speech for a year. His announcement will, if it catches the public imagination, lead to big reforms in, let us say, housing conditions. If his speech is sensational, then every newspaper will give him almost unlimited space. But experts who believe in their pet subjects have a habit of making dry speeches. Then the news editor dismisses him with: "So and so, cut this stuff to a third of a column. That'll teach the old boy not to choose a Tuesday for speeches when the paper's full up without him."

I have even heard a news editor, upon hearing of a big murder case, just as he was about to go to press, remark: "Can anyone tell me why the man must butcher someone on this particular night? To-morrow night we'd have been glad of the story."

As I have already said, this attitude is perfectly natural in men to whom news is the raw material they are handling all their lives. It doesn't mean that they are never shocked, or that their finer feelings are atrophied. It means that they must leave their own emotions out of account if they are to get any work done at all.

During his experience as a sub-editor the recruit will learn the answer to the big question, "What is news?" and if he makes a wise use of his opportunities and keeps his eyes open, he will develop a sense of the relative values of different sorts of news, so that he can tell at a glance, in all ordinary circumstances, whether a "story" is worth two columns or lines from the point of view of the particular paper on which he is working, bearing in mind, of



course, that what is valuable copy for the *Star*, say, would quite possibly be useless to the *Observer*, and vice versa.

He will be able to check his progress towards accurate news values by writing an occasional article or two in his leisure time, and submitting them either to his own paper or elsewhere. Incidentally, he would be at all times well-advised, while employed on regular staff work, to "keep his hand in" at reporting and writing so far as he has the time. In no other occupation is a "second string" so valuable as in journalism, where the staff man of to-day is only too frequently, through no fault of his own, the free-lance writer of to-morrow—at least until another position on a newspaper comes into sight.

So far, in this outline of a journalist's career, I have given no indication of how long each step up the journalistic ladder takes to attain, for the obvious reason that it is impossible to do so. One man may be a sub-editor or reporter to the end of his days, while another, for no apparent reason except a greater aptitude for the work, will soar like a comet to some editorial chair within a few years of entering a newspaper office for the first time.

Judging by the actual achievements of leading journalists to-day, there is no reason why the man possessing ability and initiative should not find progress easier in journalism than in many other walks of life. There is no such thing as an age limit, or seniority, or any similar bar to promotion; in Fleet Street merit, and merit alone, counts, except in comparatively rare cases where "influence" shows its head.

A friend of mine, with a *flair* for writing which he had cultivated as a free-lance for six years or more, entered

Fleet Street as a junior sub-editor on a Sunday newspaper. Within two years he was literary editor of the paper, with men old enough to be his father, and who had worked on the paper for years, on his staff.

To give just one more instance which should hearten any of my readers who may be despondent over their unfulfilled ambitions: A young man came to London, hoping to find an opening in Fleet Street. For a time he was unsuccessful and drifted from job to job, often "on the rocks," until, finally despairing of success, he took a small position in the provinces.

His savings were gone, the amount he earned was insufficient to allow him to put anything by. Still he clung to the dream of reaching Fleet Street. Instead of bemoaning his fate, he sat up half the night writing, and bombarded the editors who had turned him down with manuscripts. For twelve months nothing happened beyond the occasional acceptance of an article or two. But he wasn't forgotten, and at last came the offer of a sub-editor's position. He took it. Within three years he was the editor, not of a newspaper it is true, but of two periodicals which are prospering under his energetic guidance. And he is only one of the men in Fleet Street to-day who have seen their dreams come true.

Having learned all he can about news-gathering, and preparing that news for the papers, a young man would be well advised to take any opportunity that occurs of finding out something about making up the paper and "putting it to bed," to use a Fleet Street phrase. The only way of doing this is to work "on the stone"—that is, in a composing room where the pages are made ready for the foundry.

Here a representative of the news editor is stationed, fitting the news into the paper with due regard to its importance, the space at his disposal and the general appearance of the page.

Before he is qualified for this post a journalist must understand the principles of "make-up," or the arranging of the page, so that prominence is given to the most important features and the whole effect is pleasing to the eye when seen in print.

To do this isn't as easy as it sounds. For one thing there is usually little time to spare for "trimming." Then somehow make-up has a habit of looking different in the finished paper from what it does on a hurried glance at a rough proof as the page disappears into the foundry, where the plates are made and sent down to the waiting machines below.

Stories, too, have a habit of being either too long or too short, and must be cut or extended. Headings don't fit and must be altered at the last moment. Only the man who has tried to re-write a "four-decker" (*i.e.*, a four-line) heading of a famous law case, in two minutes before rushing to press, bearing in mind that each line must consist of so many letters or spaces, no more or less, can realise the strain and responsibility which this "stone work" involves, if only because it has no set rules that can be learnt, no textbooks which can be studied. It can only be mastered by actual experience, and the post is one that can only be held by the journalist who is both quick and accurate. If the last page, usually the main news page, is due in the foundry for plating at 9.31, it is useless to discover that you have altered the wrong heading or left out an important item at 9.32. There are

trains to be caught, and the machines must not be kept waiting.

Having become thoroughly experienced in what may be described as the three main branches of newspaper work—reporting, sub-editing, and make-up—the journalist's progress will depend upon himself, his inclinations and his luck. He may prefer the news side of the newspaper game and eventually secure a news editorship as the stepping-stone to an editorship.

He may develop interest in one specialised direction, *e.g.*, books, theatres, articles, or politics, in which case his aim will be to achieve fame as a writer on one particular topic, still attached to one paper, perhaps, but devoting his whole time to the work of a literary editor, or Parliamentary correspondent.

It may take the best part of a lifetime to reach such heights, or only a few years. It may mean coming to London as a sub-editor, leaving it a news editor, and returning an editor. No two careers are alike. No two people ever receive the same treatment at the hands of Fate.

Figures are notoriously dangerous things, but if a young writer or journalist justifies the early promise and enthusiasm which he brought into journalism, if he shows a natural aptitude for finding news and "dressing it up" and is the possessor of the "news sense," then he can look forward with confidence to regular and congenial work and a salary of from £10 to £12 a week, and a possible salary as a news editor of £750 a year, and as an editor of anything from £1,000 to £5,000 a year. In addition to these figures he will possess the further advantage that he can, whenever he feels like it, write an article or a number

of articles and sell them either to his own firm or to other papers or magazines, thereby increasing his income by anything from £100 to £250 a year. I have purposely avoided exceptional figures. These amounts are being made to-day by large numbers of journalists in all parts of the country who possess the necessary experience and ability to profit by the opportunities around them.

There is one more satisfaction that success will bring to the journalist whose progress we have followed. On six nights a week, so long as he is on a daily newspaper, he will be thrilled at the thought of reading to-morrow morning's news twelve hours before the outside world knows anything about it.

And still, if any curb to his pride is necessary, it will be supplied by the article which, written with experienced care and sent across the road to an editor who, once something akin to omnipotent, is now a personal friend, comes back with a "reject" slip just as so many of them used to when he was still a reader, and not a maker, of newspapers.

## CHAPTER III

### NEWS

Not so long ago the news editor of a leading Sunday newspaper told me that between midday on Saturday and four o'clock on Sunday morning, when the last edition of his newspaper went "to bed," approximately one hundred and fifty columns of copy passed over his desk—to be read, used wholly or in part, or thrown away. And his total space for news of all sorts during the night (exclusive of sport) is thirty columns, including a possible rearrangement of his news pages on four different editions during the night.

One hundred and fifty columns to be scrutinised, selected, and most of it thrown away—space for only thirty columns, perhaps only twenty-five! There in a nutshell you have the keynote of success as a news-gatherer and writer.

Brevity is the soul of modern journalism. Never use two words where one can possibly be made to do. I will not go so far as to advise the budding free-lance journalist, seeking fame with his pen, to emulate the American reporter who, when recording a fatal accident, wrote :

John Dixon struck a match to see if there was any petrol in his tank. There was. Aged 56.

But without such condensation as this there is plenty of scope for brevity. The old idea was to waste half a column of space on introducing the topic under discussion. Thus the details of a murder would be wrapped up in five hundred words about the prevalence of murders generally, the blunders of the police in getting on the track of the criminals, and perhaps a few sentences on the psychology of crime.

To-day news editors insist, and in the opinion of the writer, rightly insist, that such generalising should be left to the leader-writer. It may be interesting, but it isn't news. I remember an occasion when a reporter on a newspaper used the phrase "the long year now ending." The news editor sent for him and pointed out that a year is composed of three hundred and sixty-five days, neither more or less (unless it is Leap Year) and that no reporter could make it longer or shorter. He added: "If you want to argue whether the Gregorian calendar is a perfect arrangement, that's a special article, not news." The offending word was struck out and the reporter concerned had learned a valuable lesson in saving space.

It is a newspaper's job to supply news and to influence public opinion by the expression of views. But as the latter operation is mainly carried out by the actual staff of writers attached to the paper, the free-lance writer would be well advised to concentrate on news and not to bother about views, unless an idea coming under that category is first approved by an editor. This does not, of course, apply to general articles, or articles dealing with special subjects.

No one who has not attempted it realises how difficult

it is to write down a true and connected story of the simplest occurrence, a story which will convey to everyone who reads it exact knowledge of what actually happened. In a book recently published in Paris, telling how legends grew up during the war, it is related how at a meeting of scientists a quarrel between two of them suddenly occurred. It had been pre-arranged, and the President of the meeting, under the pretence of obtaining legal evidence, asked everyone present to write an exact report of what had happened. The assembly was composed entirely of jurists, psychologists and doctors, but only one report contained less than 20 per cent. of errors, thirteen had more than 50 per cent. of errors, and thirty-four had invented between 10 and 15 per cent. of the details. When scientists can err in this manner it can be understood that the best and most accurate report of any event is always subject to a margin of error, and that good reporting is not every man's business.

I am quoting no less an author than the late Mr. Kennedy Jones,\* and the free-lance who sets out to be a newsgatherer will quickly find out how true his statement is.

The most precious gift a journalist can have is "a nose for news"—or, in other words, a sort of sixth sense which enables him to see "a story" in the most unexpected places and unlikely moments. News is both the raw material of journalism and the main commodity upon which the free-lance depends for his daily bread.

Everything that happens is news—the arrival of a distinguished visitor, the number of passengers carried by omnibuses on a given day, the price of mutton, the story of

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\* *Fleet Street and Downing Street* (Hutchinson).



a man who got drunk and was fined five shillings and costs. But, as in other commodities, there is news and news. All ordinary events and happenings to-day are "covered" by the press agencies, who circulate it on a telegraphic "service" bought by every prominent newspaper in the kingdom. It is obviously useless for the free-lance to attempt to compete with these services.

Newspapers do not buy news about which they have already received full reports over the tape machines. And here lies the test for the free-lance. He must select the news he gathers in such a way that it falls into two distinct categories: (a) Exclusive news which is not available elsewhere. In this category fall interviews with celebrities or experts whose words throw new and interesting light on some topic of the day; news of forthcoming events not yet announced in the Press; in short, advance and unreported information of all kinds. (b) News that has been reported but which is of such a nature that the "human touch" introduced by an individual writer makes it more valuable than the generalised version circulated by the press agencies.

He must also possess a keen sense of the value of time. News ceases to be news almost as soon as the event concerned has happened. Often five minutes saved will mean to the free-lance the difference between success and failure. This question of time is of the utmost importance for two reasons. The first is, of course, that every journalist "works to the clock" and every news editor aims at getting as much news as possible into each edition. There is another aspect of the matter. From the very nature of his work and responsibilities a news editor must "see" all, or nearly all, the copy he needs to fill his

columns in hand half an hour before the edition is due to go to press. News sent to the composing room later than that is a "rush job" to be avoided unless of paramount importance. It follows, therefore, that a story which might be sufficiently interesting to run to half a column if received at, say 7.30, may be turned down at 7.45 because, while interesting in its way, it is not worth displacing half a column of other matter in order to get it in. There is, of course, the next day's paper, and sometimes a news story can be held over for nearly twenty-four or forty-eight hours without losing its topicality or appearing elsewhere. But not often. The wise free-lance will realise that in journalism above all other trades "time is the essence of the contract," and no man is so popular with the harassed news editor as the man who makes a point of getting his stories in to the minute.

To the energetic, and, I may add, not too thin-skinned young man possessing the news sense, hunting out newspaper stories is a great adventure. He will make a point of becoming acquainted with as many as possible of the people who are likely to be useful to him in collecting information concerning some topic or event of a political, criminal, diplomatic, or theatrical nature, etc.

He must, to be successful, keep his mind attuned to the slightest hint of anything likely to make a news story, and know just where to get accurate and detailed information on the subject.

In the "Life of Delane," the famous editor of *The Times*, it is related that once, by the chance remark of a doctor about the effects of the Indian climate on a certain statesman's health, he was able to be the first editor to announce the name of the new Viceroy of India at that

time. The announcement created a considerable sensation, and some people talked of a leakage of Cabinet secrets, but all that happened was that a trained journalist had overheard a piece of idle gossip which to a million other people meant nothing, but which enabled him by "putting two and two together" to make a great "scoop" long before any other newspaper heard the news officially.

If the free-lance of to-day has less opportunity than Delane had of learning Cabinet secrets, he will, if he knows his job, look for exclusive news in the most commonplace things. It was my friend, H. Hessel Tiltman, now editor of two periodicals controlled by the Amalgamated Press, who, losing his way in the maze of streets that make up London's Chinatown at Limehouse some years ago, noticed numbers of men and women passing in and out of a dingy-looking laundry shop. His curiosity aroused, he followed, and found the premises to be a Chinese pukka-poo gaming house, where illegal gambling was flourishing daily.

Discreet inquiries among foreign sailors in the neighbouring public house, and later of the police, revealed the fact that this gaming house, and many others that existed in the district, were run by one gang of wealthy Chinese, who made a large monthly income from the money "won" from sailors and sailors' wives. The next day Mr. Tiltman sold the full story to a Sunday newspaper. It aroused great interest and he was commissioned by an evening newspaper to investigate the matter further.

The point about this example of the art of news collecting is that if the journalist concerned had not possessed a keen news sense, he would not have worried over the men and women who went in and out of that laundry shop for no apparent reason, and the story would have remained

undiscovered until the police finally raided the gaming houses and closed them. As it was he enjoyed a fortnight's "stunt" and wrote nearly twelve thousand words on the subject—all the outcome of losing his bearings in Limehouse.

A remark overheard in a railway carriage, a hint in a newspaper, may be sufficient to start a train of thought at the end of which is a big "scoop." The chance discovery that certain workmen at an aeroplane factory were on overtime during a period of trade slump, coupled with the knowledge that the firm concerned are experimenting with a new type of helicopter—here are two specimen "clues" worth following up by any free-lance who knows where to sell an exclusive interview with the inventor of a helicopter.

Here let me remark that every time you seek an interview with someone and are refused an audience, it does not necessarily follow that the "story" you are after must be dropped. Providing you have solid "clues" pointing to a certain thing happening at a certain time, the fact that an interview is refused is often strong presumptive evidence that pressmen are unwelcome for fear the story comes to light. In a case like this the free-lance must decide whether to stick to his guns or let the matter drop. If satisfied his suspicions are well-founded he can prepare a carefully worded article and take it to a news editor, explaining frankly upon what information he bases his story. Often the news editor has heard rumours from another source which confirm the story, and if so, he will doubtless publish it and pay for it.

Before leaving the subject of news-gathering, reference must be made to a new and lucrative branch of this sort of

free-lance journalism. This is the writing up of the experiences of men and women who, by passing through the divorce or criminal courts, become sufficiently notorious, or arouse sufficient public interest in their cases to make it worth while printing their life stories, providing they can be induced to relate them for a sum which is not in excess of what the editor concerned considers to be their market value.

This is work which is frequently entrusted to the free-lance journalist, especially by the Sunday newspapers whose staffs are not sufficiently large to undertake it. Where addresses of persons sought after can be secured by reference to solicitors or police, the task of finding your quarry is an easy matter. But it frequently happens, especially in murder cases, that the principal cannot be interviewed, and relations, if they can be found, are either reserved or refuse point blank to be interviewed on a matter which has already brought them enough unwelcome publicity.

Then it is that ingenuity and resource stand the journalist in good stead. He must find someone who can fill in the blanks in the prisoner's past life and very probably he has only a few hours in which to do it. At such times money may assist in the hunt for information, but not always. The lengths to which a journalist must be prepared to go are well illustrated by the following story:

At the time of the capture of the murderer Topliss by the Cumberland police in 1920, a Sunday newspaper was anxious to discover a woman who was supposed to have been engaged to him at the time of the crime. Despite every effort to secure details, however, nothing could be found out, except that the girl was supposed to live at

Plymouth or in the neighbourhood. Even her name was unknown.

As the newspaper was prepared to pay £50 for a love-letter written by Topliss, the editor sent the most trustworthy and experienced free-lance journalist he knew to find her. "She's in Devonshire somewhere—find her," were his instructions.

The journalist made for Plymouth, where he drew blank. No one had heard of any girl Topliss had ever known. The police suggested trying Exeter. At Exeter nothing was known about the murderer or his associates, but a police officer gave it as his private opinion that at a small town twenty miles away the journalist might find out something.

On went the Fleet Street man, still undaunted, and in the small town he found a policeman who had heard that Topliss had "kept company" with a local girl. The girl worked at a draper's in the High Street. Together, policeman and journalist went to the shop and interviewed the proprietor. Miss B——, it appeared, worked there, but did not live in. She lived with aged parents at a village two miles away.

It was now seven o'clock in the evening and the journalist knew he had to catch the midnight express for London if the story was to reach the office in time for Sunday's paper. Hiring a motor car he drove out to the address given him by the draper, accompanied by the policeman, who was off duty and as interested in the hunt by this time as he was. Again disappointment awaited him. The girl had gone to the town he had just left to see the pictures at the local cinema!

The rest was easy. Promptly he obtained an interview

with the manager of the cinema, tactfully made his request, pointing out that it might lead to useful publicity for the cinema, and within a few minutes a message was flashed on the screen, asking the girl to leave the audience. In less than a minute the journalist found her and was explaining to the confused young lady that all he wanted was to talk about Topliss.

At first she refused to say anything beyond the fact that she was young, had made a mistake in having anything to do with such a man, and wished to forget all about him, but eventually she was persuaded to tell her story. She had only two letters from him—the journalist could have those if he would drive to a spot near her home and wait.

Ten minutes later the three were in a sitting-room at the local hotel, and the journalist, eating a few sandwiches, listened to a poignant story of a young girl's love for a blackguard. He drove her home, secured the precious letters, promised the girl a gift from the editor for her trouble, and caught the midnight train for London with five minutes to spare.

Even then he could not rest, for there would be no time to write the story after his arrival in Paddington the next morning. So half the night he sat in the swaying carriage, a rug round him for warmth, writing the story he had been within a few minutes of failing to secure.

In writing a story of this kind—indeed, in writing any sort of story for the newspapers—the human appeal must be made as strong as possible.

Nothing interests the big newspaper public so much as the "human touch." That is why stories about children and animals are so popular. They are always human as

well as just interesting. It is said, and it deserves to be true if it isn't, that in raising the *Daily Mirror* to its present predominant position in the world of to-day, Lord Rothermere's orders to his news editors were "human stories only."

He is credited with defining a human story in these words :

" If there is a fire in the City and £5,000 worth of merchandise is burnt, that's a news item worth three lines. But if at the same fire a fireman risks his life to rescue a black kitten from the top storey—that's a human touch worth half a column."

That definition couldn't be bettered. Every tree-lance should learn it by heart, for it is widely known to-day that at least half the news stories rejected every week fail because the writers have missed the human appeal—the one touch of love or devotion amid selfishness, greed and crime, which lifts the story out of the ordinary rut.

Having sketched the outline of newsgathering, I come to the question of news writing. I have already emphasised the need for brevity, but I cannot resist the following delightful quotation from an Irish newspaper, which might appropriately be headed, " How not to do it."

The Irish reporter was asked to make a news item of the fact that the local veterinary surgeon had been consulted in a case of milk fever in a cow. This is what he wrote :

DISTINGUISHED WORK BY—— V.S.

During the past week, Mr. Thomas —— had a valuable cow, his property, bad with milk fever and given up to die. Mr. John ——, V.S., was sent for and at once came and attended to the cow, and after his attention and abilities, the cow, to their great surprise, was all right.



This is an excellent example of the sort of style to be avoided at all costs. I emphasise this point because the majority of newcomers in the field of journalism seem to be imbued with the idea that high-falutin writing is what editors want. Pick up any small weekly paper and compare its method of reporting the incident of a mother saving her child from a runaway horse with the account of the same incident in a national daily.

The national newspaper will probably deal with the item in four or five lines, thus :

Rose —, aged two, had a narrow escape in High Street, Watford, when a horse attached to a baker's van bolted last night. The child was saved by its mother, Mrs. Gladys —, who heroically snatched it from its perambulator and carried it to safety. The runaway was eventually stopped by a constable.

The local paper reporting the same incident will spin out to five hundred words or more, probably opening with : "Dramatic scenes were witnessed in the High Street on Tuesday last, in which the principal actors were Mrs. Gladys—, a well-known local resident who lives at 15 Laburnham Villas, Miss Rose —, her two-year-old daughter, P.C. 81, of our Constabulary, and a horse belonging to Messrs. —, bakers, of the High Street." The reporter will go on to record in the same fashion how the horse was seen in "uncontrollable flight," drawing a lurid picture of the pram containing the child, left outside a shop by the mother engaged in "wifely duties." Readers will also be told how the fond mother, "in the exercise of her maternal devotion," risked death to snatch her child to safety.

It is just because they write in this strain that so many

"small town" journalists strive all their lives to reach Fleet Street—and end their careers in the provinces or suburbs. These men, often through no fault of their own, have never learnt to write a straightforward report in understandable language and without resorting to threadbare *clichés*. They write "commence" when they mean "begin," "opine" when they mean "believe," and refer to grouse as "the feathered denizens of the moor." In a sentence, they have never learned the golden rules in reporting news, which are never to use a long word if a short one can be found to convey the same meaning, and to be clear as well as concise.

In this respect things are improving even in the smallest papers. The number of small newspaper owners who are adopting the ideas and methods introduced into Fleet Street by Lord Northcliffe (Alfred Harmsworth) when he founded the *Daily Mail* is growing every year. But many journalists still follow the old traditions of the Victorian era, and the free-lance of to-day should be careful to avoid taking their work as his model. Alfred Harmsworth was the pioneer of modern journalism ("tabloid journalism," it has been called) and, in the words of a well-known journalist, "what the public of to-day requires is undoubtedly 'guts'—and nothing but 'guts.'"

If you want to practise news writing as it should be done, take some current event, like a Cup Final, or a Schneider Trophy race, and write it up in your own words. Then compare what you have written with the report in a newspaper like the *Daily Mail* or *Daily Express*. If you have the news instinct you will be quick to see where your report fails as compared with the other. By persevering in this way you should rapidly become conversant with

the style of writing most widely favoured among editors to-day.

Later, when your news stories begin to be published, note carefully the changes that are made in the process of sub-editing. Sometimes these are merely due to lack of space, but on the other hand some of them will certainly result in improvements to your articles. Note the latter carefully and avoid the causes of them in future. It is this respect for the minor details of a journalist's work which makes all the difference between success and failure in journalism.

News, let us admit frankly, is mainly the province of the professional, not the free-lance journalist; and it is a subject on which no book can be really instructive. But it is a subject to which every would-be journalist, staff or free-lance, should devote considerable attention, for news is the foundation of all journalism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FIELD FOR THE FREE-LANCE

FREE-LANCE journalism covers a multitude of literary activities. Articles, paragraphs, sketches, verse, features, anecdotes and a large variety of nondescript \*MSS. are produced in their thousands daily by free-lance writers and find their way into print in the large number of periodicals which accept contributions from outside sources.

One rather drastic definition of a journalist is this : " A journalist is one who writes for journals ; and if his writings be not such as the journals find it possible to publish, he cannot consider himself a journalist." The point is that the free-lance must write primarily to please editors, not himself. As a free-lance you have a wide range of subjects to choose from, you may write as much or as little as you please, you may submit your MSS. where you like, but to appear in print, you must obviously conform to editorial requirements.

A study of the market for free-lance contributions is therefore the first and most important consideration of the writer. A spasmodic glance at the contents of a few well-known periodicals is not enough. You must examine with an analytical, calculating eye all the papers you can lay hands on. It is not at first an easy matter for the

amateur to detect "outside" contributions, but *The Literary Year Book* and *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book* will come to your rescue. These useful reference books contain complete lists of all the publications prepared to accept and pay for submitted MSS. They will also yield much useful information about papers in this category of which the inexperienced writer has probably never heard.

In a word, the problem of free-lancing must be approached systematically. "*Le théâtre, c'est l'art de la préparation.*" The necessary equipment of the writer is more fully dealt with in the later chapter on Organisation and Routine, but a brief reference to certain essentials is, I think, necessary at this point.

A typewriter, a good card index system, and a cutting-file are the mechanical basis of economic and profitable free-lancing. It is also necessary, as already indicated, to keep in close and constant touch with as many papers as possible. It is amazing how a careful and systematic survey of this kind will stimulate fresh ideas and suggestions and enable you to increase your output, although the main object you have in view is to keep your finger on the ever-varying editorial pulse.

"The beginner naturally asks himself: "What shall I write about?" Unless he studies the market he may, in his inexperience, imagine that editors are prepared to accept articles dealing with the foreign policy of James I or the climate of Zanzibar. What editors print is, more or less, what the public want. The inexorable law of supply and demand governs journalism as it does other things. The market varies almost from day to day, but provides the best, and in fact, the only possible indication of

subjects for the free-lance. This will not, I hope, lead to confusion ; I do not mean that the free-lance should confine his attention to topics already dealt with. That would be absurd. But he should undoubtedly follow the trend of free-lance journalism, thereby finding out the lines on which he must set to work to win favour from editors.

The free-lance journalist should know a little about everything and everything about something. That is to say, he should have a wide general knowledge and should specialise in one subject. He should take an interest in politics, law, science, literature, art, music, the stage, sport, and all other important features of modern journalism. He should mix with people of all classes, be a citizen in the Greek rather than the modern sense. He little knows when a scrap of knowledge or information is going to be useful. Mixing with people is especially important, for, as I have said, the foundation of all journalism is news, and the man who stays at home can seldom determine the relative values of news. It is necessary to know what people are talking about to make a success of journalism. The influence of *The Times* went up by leaps and bounds when its editor hit upon the notion of hiring a clergyman to mix with all sorts of people in the streets, buses and trains to listen to and bring back reports of what people were saying. Find out what the man in the street is interested in and you won't find it difficult to satisfy editors.

From a practical point of view, however, it is more directly profitable to specialise. The subject in which you specialise will obviously be one that is especially congenial to you. It may be wireless or wild animals, spiritualism or street accidents, art or airships, Egyptology or

emigration. It should be a subject that interests you so much that you are prepared to go to the trouble of accumulating all possible data in the way of press cuttings. A thorough knowledge of only one newspaper or magazine theme is far more valuable than a partial acquaintance with a variety of scattered subjects.

To a journalist it is almost as important to know where to look for information as to have it already tucked away in his head. Frequently it happens that an article cannot be completed without reference to a good encyclopædia or a number of books on the subject. To belong to a good library is indispensable. The Reading Room of the British Museum (where you will see hundreds of writers every day) is the ideal place to seek book information on any subject under the sun, but many local libraries will prove adequate for the purpose of the journalist.

The first thing to do, then, having decided to specialise in, say, emigration, is to collect as much data as possible. Emigration is a topic which periodically engages public attention, and the writer who has carefully filed away statistics, reports of speeches, and details of changing conditions in the Dominions has a sound foundation for a number of articles on the subject, and an inestimable advantage over the haphazard writer who turns his attention to emigration only when it comes into prominence in the newspapers.

Another important point. You may have had a number of emigration articles published under your name, and you are—let us hope—by way of being an authority on the subject. Perhaps an editor happens to want a series of such articles. The first question he asks himself

is : " Who can do this emigration stuff ? " He may have seen your articles or have heard your name associated with the subject. Editors have an almost uncanny omniscience in these matters. He at once gets in touch with you and the rest is plain sailing.

An outstanding example of the value of specialisation in a subject of growing importance (for the free-lance must be careful to choose a topic that not only appeals to him, but which is likely to grow in public interest) is afforded by those journalists who made themselves conversant with the development of wireless at the very birth of that modern miracle. The number of writers who knew anything of the subject in the early days was very few, and nearly all of them became recognised authorities and obtained good positions as a result of their forethought and enterprise. In several instances their technical knowledge won for them an editorship years before such promotion might have come had they been content to remain sub-editors and writers on general subjects.

One of the most successful and best-known writers on wireless is a Civil Servant who mastered the subject as a hobby. He began to write ; and his articles, being based upon sound information, sold promptly and regularly. He wrote three books on various aspects of wireless and television. Later he became " wireless editor " of a famous weekly and " wireless correspondent " of over a dozen papers, including two great London dailies, and one in Moscow. What was at first a fascinating hobby has for years brought him a steadily expanding income. He knows everyone of importance in the wireless world, he attends all important demonstrations of new developments. His opinion is sought as that of a journalist in



close touch with public opinion. Yet he is still a Civil Servant. He has built up a "name" and an income without abandoning his regular job. To-day he could safely devote himself entirely to journalism, assured of a good income. There is a lesson here for those who imagine it is necessary to leave other employment in order to embark on free-lance journalism. Let me repeat that no one should take such a step until he has proved, by the results of spare-time writing, that he can earn a living with his pen.

Articles unquestionably provide the most promising opening for the beginner. The choice of subject and treatment will be determined, first by the obvious requirements of the paper or papers to which you propose to submit the MS. and, second, by your own ability to deal with the subject.

The newspaper article—the article which is published on the literary or magazine page, as it is variously called—offers such a splendid opportunity to those with any journalistic instinct that it deserves special attention. The London dailies: the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *News-Chronicle*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *Daily Herald*, *Evening News*, *Evening Standard* and *Star* all feature articles by outside contributors. The average length of such articles is about five hundred words, and they cover a tremendously wide range of interests. The tendency of the modern newspaper, and especially the Sunday newspaper, is to provide more magazine reading matter. Some of the American newspapers have gone to the extreme length of supplying a literally heavy budget of miscellaneous magazine matter with every week-end issue.

The newspaper article is very remunerative to the

free-lance. The *Daily Mail* will pay £3 3s. for a 400 word article on the magazine page. The rate of payment naturally varies with other papers, but is roughly about £2 2s. to £5 5s. a thousand. This is a liberal scale of payment for unknown writers. The requirements of this type of article will be readily seen from an examination of articles published from day to day. Naturally a substantial proportion are of a topical nature. An article published recently in the *London Evening News* entitled "May the Doctor Ever Be Off Duty?" begins as follows:

"A doctor's social engagements," said Mr. Justice Bailhache in the Law Courts *yesterday*, "are always provisional and are subject always to the higher calls of his patients."

"That truth needs emphasising in these days . . . etc."

I have italicised the word "*yesterday*" because it plainly indicates how quickly the writer has to set to work on an article of this kind. A week later and the judge's remarks have faded from the proverbially short memory of the public.

The weekly newspapers offer immense scope to the free-lance. Their editorial staffs are usually smaller than those of the dailies, and bright, topical and interesting articles are welcomed. The *Sunday Dispatch*, *Sunday Express*, *Sunday News*, *Sunday Chronicle* and the *Referee* use a large number of "outside" contributions. Articles signed by celebrities (this branch of free-lance activity is fully dealt with in Chapter Five), new ideas of topical interest or old ideas treated from a new and informative angle are what editors of weekly newspapers require.

Especially is there an ever-growing demand for articles of first-rate public interest, which can be "billed"

on the hoardings and advertised in the press. Generally, however, such articles are either signed by someone who is for the moment, notoriously or otherwise, in the public eye, or else based upon information secured from such celebrities. The rates paid for such "scoops" are high, and experienced staff journalists are usually hot-foot after them. The scope for the beginner who seeks this "big game" is therefore restricted, unless he is very fortunate. But the free-lance should remember the possibility of such big stories—some of the very biggest have before now been "landed" by a wide-awake free-lance.

The provincial press is also a lucrative field for the free-lance who can produce the right kind of contribution. The *Yorkshire Post*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Newcastle Chronicle*, *Glasgow Herald*, *Leeds Mercury*, *Western Mail*, *South Wales Echo*, *Western Morning News*, *Glasgow Bulletin*, *Scotsman* and *Weekly Scotsman*, *Daily Record*, *Dundee Courier*, *Dundee Post*, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, *Nottingham Journal*, *North Star*, *Birmingham Post*, and *Bristol Times and Mirror* are but a few of the many papers of excellent standing that will consider the work of the free-lance and, if acceptable, pay for it at a reasonable rate.

All the leading newspapers, both daily and weekly, and whether published in London or the provinces, carry features relating to gardening, poultry, sports, books, theatres, films, or kindred subjects, and these features offer a field as big as, if not bigger than, the news article pages, from the point of view of the free-lance. The reader will find these "feature" opportunities more fully dealt with in Chapter VI.

A not inconsiderable section of the free-lance market

lies in the monthly and quarterly magazines and reviews and the specialised papers that cater for certain well-defined classes. This section is larger and more numerous than even many established journalists believe. It ranges from famous magazines like *The London* and *The Strand* two women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman's Journal*, to reviews such as *The Contemporary*, and *The English Review*, and to semi-technical publications such as *The British-Australasian* (catering for Australian interests), *The Blue Peter*, and papers appealing to tourists and sea travellers. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is not a single interest, sect, creed, or body of public opinion, however small, that has not at least one paper of some sort, however modest in aim and circulation, to voice its views and publish articles likely to interest its readers. It should be one of the first tasks of the free-lance to get acquainted with as many potential markets as possible. A visit to a public library will probably result in the discovery of a number of hitherto unknown papers, and it not infrequently happens that a valuable new market, and a consequent increase in income, is brought about by inquiry along these lines. There are an enormous number of periodicals which cannot be conveniently classified under headings. Many of these welcome outside contributions, and although payment does not rule so high, it is a good policy for the beginner at any rate to begin at the beginning and get his stuff into print in comparatively unknown publications.

The popular weeklies, *Answers*, *Tit-bits*, *Pearson's Weekly*, *Ideas*, *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph*, *John Bull*, *Everybody's Weekly*, *Pictorial Weekly*, and many others

rely to a very large extent on the outside contributor. The requirements of these periodicals vary as much as their names, but all of them are open to buy articles from the free-lance, providing the right suggestions are put forward. What their actual requirements are obviously cannot be stated in so small a compass as this book. Their requirements, too, vary constantly. The best way to decide whether you can offer a certain editor anything likely to interest him is, as I have indicated earlier, to buy several issues of the paper and study the contents carefully. If the result of a careful analysis leads you to think that your suggestion would appeal to the same people that are likely to be interested in the articles and features you find printed in the particular issues you see, then either send the article to the editor with a short note, or write him a letter explaining your suggestion as fully as possible, and ask for permission to prepare the article for his consideration. But don't destroy any topical value your MS. may have by delay in sending a preliminary letter. Many articles of this type strike a topical note, and all MSS. submitted should be brightly written.

Writers who specialise in feminine and domestic topics will find a wide market for their output in the numerous publications of interest to women, notably *Woman's Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Vogue*, *Britannia* and *Eve*, *Lady*, *Queen*, *Woman's Pictorial*, *Home Chat*, *Modern Weekly*, *My Home*, *Wife and Home*, *Modern Woman*, *Home Notes*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Magazine*, *Weekly Welcome*, and many others.

Then there are big groups of papers covering the fields of art, literature, religion, medicine, sport,

gardening, motoring, music, poultry, wireless, and many other branches of human activity, all of which are catered for by the enterprising free-lance with a knowledge of his subject and the ability to write interestingly about it.

It is impossible to dogmatise about the type of article which the free-lance should submit, or the treatment of widely different subjects. Wellington is said to have won his battle by reasoning out the most probable tactics of the opposing general. The writer who wants to get results should try to project himself into the mentality of the editor he wishes to approach. The question every editor asks himself when considering a manuscript is: "Will my readers like this?" Which brings the writer back to his own assessment of the taste of that particular paper's readers. On the success of his judgment on the point will depend, very probably, the fate of many of his articles.

To be successful the free-lance contributor must know the public which he hopes to interest. Recently I went to see the editor of a famous weekly. He probably receives more MSS. from free-lance writers than any other London editor.

He was sitting with a large pile of articles in front of him, glancing perfunctorily at each in turn, and relegating them in two piles. I asked him what those piles signified.

"I read the two opening paragraphs," he answered, "if these contain a new fact on a subject which is topical or original, and likely to interest my readers, I place the article aside for careful consideration. But in ninety-five cases out of every hundred we don't have to read

further than the opening sentences—the subjects are either stale or all wrong for my public.”

He pulled an article from the pile at random. “Look at this—‘A Day’s Deep-Water Fishing off New Zealand.’ Now imagine a typical reader of my paper. A miner, say, who has had a hard day’s work in the pit. It is raining when he walks home, and he is fed up. He kicks off his boots, settles down by the fire, and wants to forget the monotony of life by reading something that will interest him. ‘Give me this week’s ——’ he says, and he turns the pages of my paper. Does the writer of this article on fishing off New Zealand imagine that it will interest my miner reader? Probably he has never given it a thought. But we have to. That article is too ‘narrow,’ too remote, too technical. Yet I get two hundred articles a day like that. Hopeless! And the tragedy is that just as these writers don’t know what is suitable for me, so they don’t know the right market for their articles. This fishy article, sent to a paper catering for fishermen, or interested in New Zealand, might, if authentic and well told, be snapped up. Sometimes we point that out, but we can’t always—we are too busy.”

He picked up another.

“Ah! a thousand words on ‘mail bag robberies.’ There have been over a hundred in the last year. That’s better. The subject’s red-hot. I must have that read at once.”

That conversation—there was more of it—will perhaps indicate the importance of knowing the right market for your work.

One very important point—and another sound reason for carefully studying the market—is the *value* of an

article to an editor. It may be brilliantly written, it may be a subject certain to interest the paper's readers—but *if an article on the same or a similar topic has appeared in a recent issue* it is practically certain to be rejected.

The *Daily Mail*, the pioneer of the "three-to-a-column" article on the leader page, has about three hundred articles a day submitted for consideration. "Freshness, humanity, variety and novelty are borne in mind in making the daily selection.\* During the last year or two, however, the tendency has been to concentrate mainly on big features, generally by a writer with a name, and nowadays the page never contains more than three articles and often only one. The *Daily Mail* articles should be carefully watched by the free-lance, not only because the rate of payment is high, but because the literary page is one of the best in modern journalism. It is admirably edited, and its new form, as its old, has been copied by newspapers the world over.

These 400 to 500-word articles are not easy to write. It has been said that anyone can say what he wants to in a column of a newspaper, but that it demands a highly-skilled mind to find an idea and develop it in fifty or sixty lines. The *Daily Mail* little articles, as Lord Northcliffe used to call them, have, perhaps, created a new kind of writing—direct, vivid, compact and appetising. An analysis of various topics dealt with day by day reveals that what is required is something that is pleasantly instructive or of genuine human interest. Articles appealing particularly to women appear frequently, thus testifying to the preponderance of women

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\* From *The Mystery of the Daily Mail*, by F. A. Mackenzie.



readers, and serving indirectly as an encouraging indication to the writer who specialises, or has made up his or her mind to specialise, in feminine topics.

The literary page of a newspaper must be studied, not only carefully, but intelligently. Many thousands of would-be writers are probably examining the page daily with a calculating eye, but very many of them ruin their prospects by slavish and quite stupid imitation. Imitate articles on *similar lines*, if you like, but don't make the fatal mistake of promptly imitating *subjects*.

It is the common experience of a literary page editor who has printed an article on, say "Pigs" to be forthwith bombarded with articles on pigs, piglets, guinea pigs, and pork in all its infinite variety. Such short-sighted writers are apparently under the impression that because a newspaper has published a "Pigs" article, it is necessarily interested for some time to come in pigs. The fact that such an article has been used is, of course, a clear indication, or should be, to the intelligent free-lance, that no more articles about pigs are required for a long time. And yet disgruntled readers write in and say: "I've been studying the paper to see what you do want, and I thought I'd got the idea properly—but now you appear to have changed the whole scheme of your page completely." Which, of course, is precisely what is always happening. Therefore it follows that the writer with a new idea, a new topic, or even a new method of presentation, is always pretty sure of publication, whether he be peer, policeman, or pantaloon.

The method of presentation, or the actual treatment of the article, is important. A stodgy or ponderous

style is fatal. Articles must be crisply and clearly written. Clear writing is the product of clear thinking, a truism frequently apt to be overlooked. Doctor Johnson coined an amusing phrase when he spoke of a Scotch haggis as containing some "fine confused feeding." The trouble with many amateur efforts is that they contain a good deal of "fine confused" writing.

I am aware that in dealing with the question of style in a book on journalism I am on dangerous ground. Many hard things have been said of "journalese"—although I wonder what some of our armchair stylists would produce if they were called upon to write up a 500-word news report in twenty minutes. In journalism style should be like water, taking the shape of the vessel it is poured into. An article intended for publication in *John Bull* demands treatment decidedly different from one intended for the *The Fortnightly Review*. Impurity of style is not a deadly literary sin by any means, and is certainly not confined to journalism. The classic advice to those who would learn to write is "to study Addison day and night." Yet Addison's English abounds in mistakes of grammar and syntax. Joseph Conrad, popularly supposed to be a master of "pure" English, is frequently guilty of elementary grammatical mistakes. Unkind critics of journalism generally seem to be more intolerant of the hurried journalist than of a leisurely poet like Homer who, we all know, sometimes nods.

Not that I am advocating careless or slipshod writing. Many contemporary journalists, to whom I shall refer presently, afford an admirable example of sound and even distinguished language. My point is that style should be left to take care of itself, not consciously

cultivated. Clear, plain writing is what the journalist requires. Let me quote Tchekhov.

Anyone can understand me when I write "The man sat on the grass"; they can understand me because it is clear and arrests the attention. On the other hand one cannot easily understand me, it is a load in one's brain, if I write "A tall, narrow-chested, middle-sized man, with ginger-coloured beard, sat on the green grass, trampled down by pedestrians; he sat down quietly, timidly, nervously looking round." This cannot get into one's brain straightaway, and writing must get into the brain at once, in a second.

Vagueness is one of the besetting sins of the amateur, not only in his theme, but in his treatment of it. If an article is meant to be informative it should be crisply packed, not overladen, of course, with relevant information. The word "relevant" is important. In a newspaper article, especially, the writer must simply keep to the point. He must not even try and say too much. *Tout dire, c'est trop dire*. Superfluous words should be ruthlessly deleted. Express yourself as briefly as possible. The length of your article must never be lost sight of. If you are limiting yourself to 500 words, write 600 or 700 if you like, but afterwards condense to the required length drastically. Overcome the beginner's natural reluctance to destroy what he has created. Remember Hamlet's lament: "Words, words, words!"

Great care should be bestowed on both beginning and end of an article. The ending should leave a decisive impression in the reader's mind and is, if anything, more important than the beginning. As A. G. Gardiner ("Alpha of the Plough") says: "The ending is no less

decisive than a good beginning ; you can recover from a bad beginning, but not from a bad ending."

The body of the article should carry the reader swiftly and logically from one point to another. Unless you have the rare gift of expressing an attractive personality in words—which, I think, is the explanation of certain writers' popularity—you mustn't think that the reader is willing to read everything you write. He expects to be amused or instructed ; you, as a writer, must obediently provide entertainment or information, often both at the same time.

Every writer must build up his own style. The only point I wish to emphasise is that in journalism all writing must be strictly disciplined by considerations of the editor's space, and the reader's time—and patience.

The unknown free-lance will, however, derive inestimable benefit from an intelligent study of the work of some present day journalists. When one considers the necessary ephemeral quality of writing done at high pressure it is astonishing how much consistently good work is published throughout the year. The young writer should make a point of reading any newspaper contribution by Sir Philip Gibbs, whose breadth of view and judgment are matched by a brilliantly clear and attractive style ; A. G. Gardiner ("Alpha of the Plough"), a former editor of the *Daily News* and now a regular contributor to the *Star* and *John Bull*, whose articles triumphantly survive the test of publication in book form ; Robert Lynd, the present literary editor of the *News-Chronicle*, whose *flair* for the perfect phrase is remarkable ; H. V. Morton, whose graphic pen regularly entertains the readers of the *Daily Express* ; J. L. Garvin, in *The Observer*, a

vigorous, challenging writer always; Robert Blatchford, who probably has a bigger popular following than any other living journalist; James Douglas, in the *Sunday Express*, who knows the secret of stimulating controversy; Hannan Swaffer, dramatic critic on the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*; Jane Doe (*Answers*); "The Londoner" (*Evening News*); "Beachcomber" (*Daily Express*); K. R. G. Browne (*Evening News*); all of whom are variously distinguished in modern journalism. Many other writers prominent in journalism are always worth reading, notably H. G. Wells. Arnold Bennett, Arthur Machen, Rose Macaulay, Clemence Dane, Bernard Shaw, Dean Inge, Crawford Price, W. R. Calvert, Shaw Desmond, Edith Shackleton, Storm Jameson, Christine Jope-Slade, Hamilton Fyfe, Sydney Dark, E. Roffe Thompson, Edward Shanks, F. Yeats-Brown and Frank Swinnerton. The budding journalist who appreciatively studies their work should derive from it both pleasure and profit.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERVIEWS AND IDEAS

THE days when one had, with few exceptions, to be a journalist in order to write for the press are now over. To-day it is difficult to pick up a newspaper without finding in it articles signed by novelists, politicians, actresses, and others, filling space that was formerly the close preserve of the journalist.

This craze for "names," that is, for features by, or interviews with, celebrities, reached its height in the days immediately following the war. The "signed article" is not so prominent now that editors have rediscovered the fact that journalists do occasionally write something outstanding enough to be read, whether the name above it is "A. Smith," "Lord Westward," or "Miss Pansy Footlights," but in spite of this, "names" are still sufficiently sought after in Fleet Street to make it worth the while of the free-lance carefully to study this branch of journalism.

It is, I believe, common knowledge that very few of the hundreds of articles which appear under famous or notorious names in our newspapers and magazines every month are actually written by the people who sign them. In this fact lies the only justification for the signed article from

the point of view of the working free-lance—it does not take so much bread out of the journalist's mouth as is sometimes stated to be the case. In fact, the very reverse is often the case, for the free-lance who writes an article and gets a "good" celebrity to sign it, either as its author or in an interview, will almost certainly get a higher rate of remuneration for the article than if he offered it to the paper under his own name, that is, unless he is very well known to the readers of that paper himself.

Quite recently I heard of a free-lance who thought out an original idea on a political subject. Straightway he sat down and wrote two thousand words. Upon reading it he found that what he had written was very close to the line of thought that Mr. —, an ex-Cabinet Minister, held on the same subject. Before offering the article to anyone, therefore, he rang up Mr. —'s private secretary and obtained an appointment to see him. When he explained his mission, and the secretary had read the article, he agreed that it was very close to Mr. —'s ideas on the subject, and promised to bring it to his notice.

Two days later, the free-lance received the article back, corrected in one or two minor details and signed by Mr. — "in an interview." He at once sold the American rights to a New York journal for £50, and the British rights to a prominent magazine for £40. But without that magic signature he would have received only £5 or £6 for it in this country and the American rights would, of course, have been useless.

There is nothing dishonest about this sort of "scoop." The article or interview does what it is supposed to do, that is, it sets forth the opinion of the person signing it on

the subject discussed. Incidentally this traffic in "names" is helping numbers of enterprising journalists to enjoy incomes which would make the "old timer" of thirty years ago green with envy.

Here I would like to say a word of caution. Good incomes are to be made out of signed articles, provided the free-lance has the right sort of ideas and can either induce the right sort of celebrities to talk or can talk for them. But do not be encouraged by the example I have quoted above to think that you can depend on success continuing. In free-lance journalism nothing is certain until you have a letter of acceptance from an editor, or your contribution is actually in print—and the cheque in payment isn't always certain even then.

"Ninety pounds for a day's work!" says the newcomer. "That's a possible £540 a week." I suppose it is in theory, but it certainly is not in fact. For one thing, the greatest journalist who ever lived, would probably not get an idea worth £90 once a month. If he got three such ideas a year, he would be something approaching a genius. For another, in journalism, as in other walks of life, the income earned in days of success must be spread over days of failure.

The free-lance who sets out to capture signed articles and interviews must be case-hardened against disappointment. He will waste hours in writing, telephoning and waiting, and then probably only meet with disappointment at the end of all his efforts. Fifty per cent of his letters asking for interviews will never be answered at all. Fifty per cent of the balance will be of the "regret that I have no views on the subject" variety. When a precious appointment has been secured, the free-lance will find in



fifty per cent. of cases that the person interviewed will decline to say anything worth printing. It will be "an inopportune moment," or "the political situation necessitates caution," or it "does not do to be too definite."

Not once in a hundred times will the free-lance secure the really strong article he is seeking. Yet invariably just when he has decided that signed articles and interviews aren't worth the trouble of getting them, he will "land" one which he has only got to mention on the telephone to an editor to sell for £100. And with this nest-egg in his bank as tangible proof that chasing celebrities for copy does pay, he starts all over again.

A fee of £100 would, of course, only be paid for an interview with, or an article by, someone who is very near the centre of the world's stage at the moment when the contribution is secured. President Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George, Marshal Haig, or Admiral Beatty would have been worth that sum, both here and in America, to any journalist who could have induced them to talk during the Peace Conference, or within a week or so of its close. So would Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, on the day following the General Election of 1929, or Michael Collins at any time up to the Irish Settlement. Once let the question be settled, however, if only by six hours, and an article by Michael Collins would have fallen in value to £50 or less. A man who is likely to be Prime Minister within a few weeks, an inventor on the eve of a great discovery, someone unexpectedly acquitted after a sensational trial, these people are rich prizes to the journalist who is lucky enough to induce them to talk.

But it isn't easy. Usually there are dozens of

would-be interviewers there before you are. In the race to secure the "scoop" it is often little details that count, such as speed in reaching the person you are after, and the way you approach them. Any introductions you can obtain will often prove invaluable to you when approaching people. At the same time money spent on your personal appearance will, within reason, be a good investment, inspiring confidence. Remember that almost every prominent person has had at least one unhappy experience of getting into print an interview garbled or cut, so that the views expressed were altered without consent. For this reason be sure that your notes of the interview are complete and legible. It is customary to offer a proof of the article for correction, and any editor will see that this is forwarded before publication if such an arrangement is made at the time of the interview.

Whether the person interviewed desires to see a proof or not, it is as well to secure a signature to your notes, or to the interview when typewritten. More than one promising free-lance has suffered for not taking this precaution, for when the interview appears and, as it may, raises opposition to its views, it is fatally easy for the person concerned to say: "I have been incorrectly reported," and correspondingly difficult for the free-lance, unless he has a signature to either his notes or his copy, to prove his innocence to the editor concerned.

That this is not a mythical danger is proved by the experience of a certain flourishing free-lance of my acquaintance. This journalist, who is also an accomplished linguist, was lucky enough to secure an audience with a certain European Premier who visited London not so very long ago. At the interview he induced the Premier

to express his views on a certain topic of considerable importance to both countries, and to agree to their publication as a special message to Britain. The article duly appeared, and the views expressed aroused considerable opposition, whereupon the Premier promptly repudiated the article and denied that he had been interviewed at all !

It was a bold step, and also a very unsportsmanlike one, for if his denial had stood unchallenged, the journalist concerned would never have been able to sell another line to any of the great newspapers. In the newspaper game, when time is so often too short for any sort of check on contributions offered, editors have to be guided almost wholly by the personal reputation of the journalist concerned. In this case, however, the Premier had, unfortunately for himself, overlooked the fact that he had signed the notes at the time the interview took place. This fact the newspaper in which it had appeared promptly reported, with the result that the Premier took refuge in silence.

This question of proof is one of the utmost importance to every journalist whose income, or even "pocket money," depends upon his pen. There can be hardly a single journalist in Fleet Street who has not at some time or other been in the position when his reputation and his job alike depended upon his ability to prove that he had at least taken all reasonable precautions to ensure his facts being correct. And when every reasonable effort that can be made to avoid mistakes has been made, there remain hazards which no amount of care can avert, such as the case where a journalist received a typewritten article from a dignitary of the church, sold it to a Sunday

newspaper, and the day following publication, learnt to his horror that the article wasn't exclusive at all, but was a "word for word" copy of another which had appeared in a rival paper a week before, and which the dignitary's secretary had copied, rather than face the trouble of preparing a new one!

Another piece of advice which will prove of value to the free-lance is "Study your subject." By this I mean learn something about the matter on which you are hoping to secure an interview if it is at all possible. Famous doctors and statesmen and scientists are, after all, only human, and they like a newspaper man to know something about the subject under discussion, if only because there is less risk of the interviewer, through ignorance, confusing what is said.

The art of interviewing, however, starts with the birth of an idea. Ideas are the seed from which articles grow. So precious is the really original idea that many editors will willingly pay for ideas alone, providing they are sufficiently striking and that it is possible to carry them into effect.

All ideas are not merely the groundwork for articles, however; some are of the "stunt" variety, calculated to increase the circulation of the paper or magazine adopting them by their novel appeal. One of the cleverest ideas in the "stunt" class stands to the credit of the late Sir Arthur Pearson. In one of the early influenza scares this enterprising newspaper owner decided to insure the readers of *Pearson's Weekly* against influenza. He didn't go to an insurance company. Instead he bought up all the oil of eucalyptus he could find in London, and soaked the whole issue in it. The result was an

amazing run on the paper. Everybody wanted a copy of the periodical that protected the reader from the deadly "flu" germ. Everywhere, in the City, at the seaside, in the suburbs, it peeped out of the pockets and muffs of people who protected themselves against infection by carrying it. The issue was reprinted again and again, until there was no more eucalyptus left in which to soak the paper. That one idea had added not thousands, but tens of thousands to the circulation. What was more valuable, it started people talking about the paper itself all over the country.

Ideas like that, however, are akin to genius, and, like true genius, are not met with every day. The free-lance must depend for the main part of his income upon the idea which is "good for" an article from 500 to 3,000 words.

This class of idea may be divided into two sections. There is the idea which needs the signature and prestige of some well-known man to make it of interest to an editor, and the idea which is of sufficient general interest to sell under the signature of the journalist himself or without a signature at all.

An example of the first sort of article would be "London's Saddest Sight—A Day in a Police Court." Here is an article which will automatically be doubled in value if carrying the signature of a well-known magistrate. On the other hand, an article on "When Royalty Travels" or "What we get for our Taxes" will stand an equal chance of being accepted whether signed by a journalist or a celebrity.

How can a beginner differentiate between articles that should bear a signature, and those that need not?

Generally speaking, an article which will carry greater conviction if bearing a well known name could, with advantage, bear the signature of someone identified in the public mind with the subject under discussion. Tom Smith of Fleet Street may have collected an immense fund of anecdotes on big game hunting. He may have read every book on the subject ever written, and be able to prepare an interesting article on the subject. But he will probably find, at least until he is himself well known among editors, that it is immensely more difficult to sell his articles without the addition of the signature of some peer known as a game hunter than it is with it.

Turning to the type of article that sells on its merits, that is, without the signature of some celebrity, the free-lance finds himself face to face with the fetish of topicality. There is a right day somewhere in the three hundred and sixty-five for every idea that ever matured in the brain of a journalist, and it is the free-lance's job to discover the psychological moment, and dash the article off to the editor, so that he receives it just as he is debating where he can obtain an article on that very subject.

To develop topicality to perfection needs a certain amount of organisation. There are a certain number of subjects like the Derby, Christmas, the Boat Race, the Waterloo Cup, and the Cup Final, which come round every year. Other events, such as elections, come round every few years.

In fact it may be said that every annual event—and the very coming of spring and autumn itself—offers opportunities to the free-lance for seasonal articles, or

"hardy annuals," as Fleet Street irreverently describes this sort of article.

To give a complete list of "hardy annuals" would need a separate volume, but the following short catalogue will show the immense field covered under the general heading of "seasonal articles."

| ARTICLE       |    |    | WHEN TOPICAL                     |
|---------------|----|----|----------------------------------|
| Winter Sports | .. | .. | December                         |
| Fireworks     | .. | .. | November 5th                     |
| Swimming      | .. | .. | April-June                       |
| Shooting      | .. | .. | Autumn                           |
| Peace         | .. | .. | November 11th                    |
| Bands         | .. | .. | Crystal Palace<br>Annual Contest |
| Cats and Dogs | .. | .. | At times of Shows                |
| Holidays      | .. | .. | Easter-September                 |
| Invention     | .. | .. | Meeting of Royal<br>Society      |
| Pantomime     | .. | .. | December                         |

The free-lance should enter all such events in a diary whenever he knows the dates, and see that well ahead of the time when they are topical he offers suitable articles bearing on the subjects to the various editors with whom he is in touch.

Birthdays, anniversaries, Royal visits, calamities such as great fires, floods and earthquakes—in fact any subjects on which you have, or can secure any information not generally known to the public—offer opportunities for topical articles either on the leader or magazine pages of newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*,

or the *Daily Dispatch*, or in the popular weeklies or monthly magazines.

Be sure, however, that your articles or suggestions are not late. It is surprising how many writers and journalists offer Christmas features to magazine editors in December—probably two full months after the last pages of their Christmas issues have been put to press.

Find out how far ahead of publishing date each periodical and magazine you wish to write for goes to press. Generally it is three or four full weeks in the case of weekly periodicals, and six or seven weeks in the case of monthly magazines. Newspapers, of course, are in the favoured position, from the point of view of topicality, of going to press only a few hours before they are on sale.

In seeking ideas the inexperienced are always prone to tackle subjects of which they have no actual knowledge. Most of the rejection slips collected by would-be journalists, before they see their work in print can, I think, be traced to this tendency to allow ambition a full rein. Aim high, by all means, but if at first the young free-lance tries his hand at subjects with which he is fully conversant, he is more likely to progress than if he writes on topics beyond his own experience. The necessity of writing on any and every subject that editors will want will come later, when he has learnt more about the ingredients of a good article or news story.

This does not mean that the free-lance will find any shortage of subjects to write about. Ideas, like air, are to be found everywhere. That is the important fact which is vouched for by many of the most successful free-lances and journalists of the present day, whose advice to the beginner appears in another chapter of this



book. If, in walking through Covent Garden Market, you see a fruit porter balancing six, or even seven large fruit baskets on his head, one on top of another, this at once suggests an article on "everyday athletics." Jot the idea down in your diary and start looking round and studying the papers for other examples of feats of strength performed in the course of the day's work.

Again the sight of a motor-car skidding on a wet day would remind the wide-awake free-lance that after years of experiments we are still unable to find a road surface that will stand hard wear and at the same time be proof against skidding. This again suggests an article on "Inventions the World is Waiting for."

These are but two everyday examples of how ideas are to be found. Some of my readers may say that both the articles I have mentioned have been published already and are therefore stale. But my plan is not to give the reader ideas ready made. That is an impossibility in any book on journalism. Rather I am anxious to show you the machinery, as it were, behind the successful idea. And the very fact that both the examples I have given have been used over and over again, only proves the skill of the unknown journalists who first thought them out.

It often happens that there is an excellent idea for a magazine story lurking in a news item that has already been fully discussed in the newspapers. For example, writing up the surrender of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow suggested to one journalist present, a magazine article reviewing the new position of the world's navies after the Germans had lost their fleet. In the same way, the alert free-lance engaged on a newspaper story while an election is in progress, may see a striking poster which

suggests an article on "Posters that have won Elections." Again, watching a Lord Mayor's Show may reveal some "side line" of the main story, such as, What becomes of the gorgeous uniforms after they are discarded? A free-lance who followed up this line of thought discovered that, together with old Mayoral robes, officers' uniforms, court uniforms, etc., they are bought by a firm that sends them out to the wilds of Africa, where they are sold to chiefs of native tribes. Here was an excellent popular periodical story, the existence of which was for years unsuspected by the journalists who wrote up the Lord Mayor's Show.

It may be that a good idea will occur to the free-lance from time to time, to write which information is needed that cannot be secured at the moment, or which he is unable to find. To avoid the loss of such ideas, an "Ideas Book" should be kept, in which are entered all ideas as they are thought out. A sharp look-out should then be kept in papers and magazines for any items of news that fit in with these "suspended" ideas. In this way the material upon which a most interesting article can be based will gradually be got together from an idea, which, had it not been noted at the time, would almost certainly have passed right out of mind.

To give but one example: you may be anxious to write an article on "Remarkable Twins." Here the need for an Ideas Book is obvious. Unless the young free-lance has a library of "cuttings" dating back considerably before the time of his arrival in Fleet Street, he will not be able to find enough material for the article immediately. So he enters the title in his Ideas Book and keeps a sharp look-out for items of news concerning remarkable twins of all sorts, past and present.

The first thing he will discover is the great number of twins mentioned in the newspapers that he never noticed before. He will find remarkable twins mentioned at Company Meetings, in Police Court reports, among the theatrical news, and in the general news columns. All these references should be cut out and filed away in an envelope marked "Twins."

When you feel that you have enough facts to carry out the original idea, prepare your article, taking your facts from the cuttings, but presenting them, of course, from the special angle selected. Then file the cuttings away again for future use.

Never waste ideas. They are your only true capital. Whether you intend writing the article or securing the interview immediately, jot the idea down directly it occurs to you, or it will be forgotten. And if all your ideas don't seem exactly original to you, take comfort in the reflection that there is nothing new under the sun. The real science of journalism consists in giving what the Americans call "a new angle" to an old story, so that it compels interest, not because of the original facts it contains (though these naturally strengthen any article if they are available), but because of the original light which it sheds upon some problem of immediate interest to the great majority of those who read it.

## CHAPTER VI

### *FEATURES*

#### APPROACHING EDITORS

FEATURES—articles or comments upon special subjects which appear regularly in a newspaper or magazine—are the “sheet anchor” of the established free-lance journalist.

But by no means everyone who can write general articles possesses the knowledge or the ability necessary to contribute a regular feature to a daily or weekly newspaper or magazine. Features are, in fact, principally contributed by journalist experts on the various subjects dealt with and, while there is no reason why every free-lance should not become proficient enough in at least one topic to write regularly on it, it is necessary to ask the question, “Am I really an expert?” before you set out to capture the share of the feature market that is open to you.

A feature can be sold somewhere on almost any subject under the sun of which you have expert and up-to-date knowledge. Some features run only for a given number of weeks, or are seasonal, while others run year in and year out.

Serial stories (although fiction is in a different category)

are an example of a feature which runs for a definite number of issues only. Football and cricket notes, hunting notes and swimming intelligence are all seasonal features which only appeal to a limited public during a certain period of each year.

Most features, however, to be found in the popular press, are the sort that appear all the year round. They are altogether too numerous to be listed in full in here, but a few examples are

|                 |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Health Notes    | Poultry Notes       |
| Puzzle Corner   | Wireless Notes      |
| Society Gossip  | Parliamentary Notes |
| Book Reviews    | Theatrical Notes    |
| Gardening Hints | Beauty Hints        |
| Chess Column    | Bridge              |
| Motoring Notes  | Cycling Column      |
| Hobbies Page    | Woman's Page        |

Not all of these features which you will find in our newspapers are contributed by free-lance journalists, of course. The Woman's Page is under the charge of a woman's editor, who buys a certain amount of material from outside contributors and prepares the rest herself. Parliamentary Notes, again, are usually written by a member of the staff retained to "cover" the particular subject, and book reviews are as often the work of authors or staff as of free-lance journalists.

But after allowing for all these limitations there remains a huge field of endeavour open to the free-lance, and one which offers him some hope of a regular, or at

least semi-regular income among the varying fortunes of Fleet Street.

Take what are known as the gossip pages of our newspapers, as an example. This feature, comprising exclusive and interesting items of a social, political and general character, appears regularly in a number of papers, including the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *Sunday Pictorial*, *Sunday Herald*, *Evening News*, *Evening Standard*, *Star*, *Glasgow Bulletin*, *Daily Record*, *Leeds Mercury*, etc. In most cases, though not all, the feature is not the work of any one person, but is contributed by three or four free-lance journalists. The rates paid vary from 5s. a paragraph to 1s. a paragraph in the provinces. Items of news supported by a photograph are usually welcomed and the photograph paid at the rate of 10s. 6d. extra, if published.

The two essential qualifications for the gossip writer are first, certain sources of advance information on coming events, or anecdotes concerning people in the public eye, and secondly, the power of compression, which makes it possible to tell a complete story in a paragraph of about fifty words or less.

There is no doubt that this particular branch of journalism is a "knack" which is not possessed by many, and which finds its highest form in the work of such well-known journalists as Hannen Swaffer, Charles Graves of the *Daily Mail*, Viscount Castlerosse of the *Sunday Express*, and "The Rambler" of the *Daily Mirror*.

Given the two qualifications I have mentioned, there is a lucrative field open to the free-lance in this class of work. There is more than one free-lance who to-day is

making from £6 to £8 per week out of gossip. Moreover, to earn this sum it is not necessary to compress into a paragraph a "story" which is worth a column. Gossip is comment rather than news. It is here that the "news instinct" should be used to decide how to handle any information received. Supposing, for example, that you have discovered that the Prime Minister is about to resign. Here is an item of news for which any Gossip Editor would willingly pay. But the experienced free-lance will take it to the editor, sell the story for £5 or more, and then rush out all the paragraphs about the Prime Minister he can to all the Gossip Editors he is in touch with. These paragraphs would consist of anecdotes, reminiscences, habits and items about the statesman concerned, not used in the main story, to which references could be made in some way for the sake of topicality. For hypothetical example :

#### RESIGNATION ?

General regret will be felt if the rumours of Mr. —'s resignation are confirmed. Politicians of all shades of opinion appreciate the Prime Minister's honesty and courage, with which he has faced the problems to be dealt with. At Westminster it is pointed out that twice before similar rumours were afloat—in September, 1929, and again last January—and came to nothing, so I advise readers to await further news. If resignation really comes, I am informed on high authority that his successor will be either the Right Hon. —, or Mr. —.

## AN ELECTION STORY

Talking of Mr. — reminds me of a good story that was related during his last electoral contest. He was addressing a large meeting during which he was being severely heckled. For once the Prime Minister lost his temper. "One fool at a time, please," he said to the interrupters. Back like a flash came the reply: "All right, guv'nor, you speak first."

Don't forget that features of all kinds, except chess and motoring notes, are read largely by women. There is always something that can be added on this side of the question like this:

If Mr. — does leave No. 10 Downing Street, I somehow don't think Mrs. — will be sorry. The official residence of the First Minister of the Crown is far from perfect as a home. There is no study for the Prime Minister, and it is only recently that a bathroom was installed. The Prime Minister's own home, at Godalming, in Surrey, if less historical, is built in accordance with Mrs. —'s well known ideas of the modern labour-saving home. Indeed, for convenience and modern improvements it beats many of the much vaunted "show houses" in the United States.

It is not necessary to carry this example further. For the expenditure of a few coppers on some of the papers I have named will enable the free-lance with ambition to



become a gossip writer to see for himself the sort of paragraphs for which each paper is seeking.

Generally speaking it is the journalist who "gets about" and meets the famous at lunches, interviews and various functions, who finds in gossip writing an easy way to augment his income by developing a connection in "small talk." At least one Fleet Street journalist made a vow years ago that he would write two gossip paragraphs a day for a certain paper for 5s. in order to lunch free, and from that day to this he has never failed once to turn in the hundred words which provide him with a satisfying lunch at the expense of the newspaper concerned.

Gossip writing and Parliamentary notes are the most "newsy" of the various features I have enumerated above. Of the others, "Health Notes" are, for obvious reasons, usually written by doctors who are, by the rules of the British Medical Association, prevented from "advertising themselves" by signing their work.

Book reviews and theatrical notes are—more or less—the work of literary and dramatic critics. To be successful as a critic needs a wide experience of reading and play-going, and an analytical mind which can pierce through the veil of language and realise what was in the author's mind, and how far he or she has succeeded. Generally speaking this is a responsible field which it is not easy for a young man to enter until he has claimed a measure of attention in other walks of journalism, or become a success as a novelist or playwright himself.

The remainder, gardening hints, motoring notes, etc., constitute a wide field, open to all, in which the best informed man wins. It is a fact, often overlooked, that the

mind, for if he can see a little farther than others, he may emulate the luck of the small band of half a dozen skilled wireless writers who at the commencement of the boom suddenly had to work night and day writing about what they had until then regarded more or less as a fascinating hobby, and who to-day are still in the front rank of wireless journalists and making considerably more out of this one feature than many staff journalists are out of their positions.

The golden rule regarding feature journalism is to keep to the subjects that interest you. The man who contributes Poultry Notes or Garden Notes to a newspaper is not only paid for the 1,000-word article, he is paid to be accurate. Sometimes his knowledge is further taxed by correspondence from the readers of the paper, which only the absolute expert on the subject concerned can answer helpfully. This means keeping in very close touch with the subject, and devoting what at first will probably seem more time to it than it is worth. But in these cases knowledge is capital, which will continue to bring in more or less regular dividends long after it has been acquired.

To give but one more example. A journalist on a certain weekly magazine had but one ruling passion in life—football. In the days when sports papers were unknown in a popular form, he studied the game at every opportunity, and travelled up and down the country as far as his work would permit, to watch the progress of certain teams and players.

When the football boom began in post-war days it was natural that this journalist should receive a share of the work. In actual fact, so good was the information which

he had stored away in his brain while developing his hobby, that his free-lance football work speedily became more lucrative—and more profitable—than the staff position which he held. He resigned and settled down to devote his whole time to writing about football. His friends said it couldn't be done—that he would have to write short stories and general articles as well in order to make a living. They were wrong, for to-day that journalist is making a larger income than ever from football. Every year he has been definitely commissioned to write nearly seventy thousand words on the Cup Final alone. His plunge into "feature journalism," and only one feature at that, has paid him so well that he can now afford a three months' holiday abroad every summer.

It would be an exaggeration to say that any feature will make the enterprising journalist wealthy overnight. It won't.

Probably only four subjects, like racing, football, wireless and motoring, have such a wide appeal. The rest offer the nucleus of a steady income, which is as important, if not more so, to the journalist as to any other members of the community. Bridge, gardening, Nature notes, hobbies, cycling, dirt track and dog racing, film notes, naval matters—on all these specialised subjects there are one or two journalists "at the top" who make a comfortable income out of their one subject. But to get to the top, in the absence of a sudden wave of interest as in the case of wireless, takes time, and the wise free-lance will be satisfied to see half his week's work booked up on features at first, leaving the other half to produce whatever it will in the shape of general news, stories, interviews

and articles which, if more precarious, are often paid for at a higher rate than the feature article, which is sure from the free-lance's point of view.

Turning to the actual construction of the feature article, this varies but little from the general article and the style followed should be the same. The main point to be remembered is to write as simply as possible and to avoid technicalities, or, if you cannot avoid them, then explain them wherever possible. Whatever your subject, always bear in mind that you are anxious to increase the number of readers interested in that particular topic. Therefore, write with a view to interesting the reader who is approaching the topic for the first time. Any critical journalist will, I think, agree with me when I say that the reason why so many of the features published in our newspapers to-day fail to hold their share of readers, is because their writers have chosen to be technically admirable rather than popularly interesting. This does not mean that inaccuracies in a technical subject do not matter. They do, for the reader who finds the feature writer out in a mistake will probably never trust him again. But the truth can be made interesting, and it is the journalist's job to do this at all costs. If he doesn't, if his feature becomes a mere statement of facts, without anything of interest about them except that they are right, then sooner or later the editor will realise that the feature isn't "pulling its weight" and give instructions for it to be discontinued.

It should be borne in mind that even regular features can be given a degree of topicality from time to time, and no effort should be neglected to do so. If you are contributing "Health Hints," for instance, do not choose a

week in June to write on influenza if you can do so in February, when that complaint is normally more prevalent in this country. On the other hand, an article on sunstroke will have a greater chance of success if it reaches an editor during the hot months than it would in December. Other feature topics, in addition to gossip and gardening notes, should be made as topical as possible in this way—remembering that the reading public is deeply interested in the present, mildly curious about the immediate future, and largely indifferent about those subjects which do not affect it.

Before the free-lance has seen his first regular feature safely launched into print, he must have approached one editor, possibly several. A few remarks on this subject, therefore, may be useful.

Generally speaking, the editors of our national newspapers and periodicals, or their lieutenants (news editor, literary editor, and women's editor, etc.), are generally accessible to any journalist who has any genuine suggestion to put forward. Editors are busy men—among the busiest in the country during office hours—and every day floods of articles, or ideas and suggestions are poured in to them in such quantities that, with the best will in the world, it is often impossible for them to see anyone except those callers whose business is known and urgent, if they are to produce a paper at all. I know that this is so because, during my own early days in Fleet Street, I was able on more than one occasion, as an unknown man, to walk right into the presence of famous editors who, years later, when I knew them better, would often refuse to see me. In the first instance I had happened to call at the right moment—that was all.

I do not think free-lance journalists of considerable experience always appreciate this constant conflict which goes on in most newspaper offices, between the desire to see every caller and the imperative necessity of concentrating on the next issue of the paper. The editor of a London daily newspaper told me not very long ago that he never had less than a hundred callers a day. Supposing he saw them all for only four minutes, that would mean nearly six hours a day spent in talking, before he thought about the real work of the day—which is to produce a newspaper.

Obviously, then, editors cannot see everyone and the wise free-lance will accept that fact and not feel disappointed if, when he calls at a certain newspaper office and asks for the editor, a member of the editorial staff is told to find out his business. The wisest thing to do under these circumstances is to say that you will write the editor fully on the matter.

When you do write, be brief. The same harassed editor who cannot find time to see you, has to deal with perhaps hundreds of letters a day, so don't waste words on the obvious.

Wherever possible, as when you are suggesting a feature, offer to submit the actual copy or first article if he is interested, and don't forget to mention any qualifications you may possess to write on that particular subject you are suggesting. An editor is invariably shy over new writers until he knows from experience they can write. Then a suggestion will often suffice to bring back instructions to go ahead with the article.

When approaching an editor for the first time, then, adopt some such form as this :

Dear Sir,

*I am wondering whether you would be interested in a weekly motoring notes feature for the Daily——*

*I have been in close touch with the motoring world, am a member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and a contributor to a large number of newspapers and magazines, including——.*

*If you are interested, I should be happy to submit a specimen article to you, or to call and discuss the suggestion should you wish.*

*Yours truly,*

The tendency in writing a letter like this is not to conclude without saying something about "*there is, I am sure, no need for me to point out the big advance in popular favour which motoring has enjoyed during the past few years, and the wide circle of your readers to whom such a feature would appeal.*" This sort of thing, suitably adapted, is all right when you are writing to celebrities in an effort to induce them to talk on their pet subject. They may have overlooked the fact, and in any case, gentle flattery won't do any harm.

But when you are writing to an editor there is really no need to elaborate your letter in this way. He already knows better than you do, exactly how great is the popular appeal of the subject you are suggesting, and very probably he can also make a calculation as to the number of his readers interested in the subject which you suggest. So be brief, and the editor will, in all probability, show his appreciation of your wisdom in not wasting words, by being equally prompt and to the point in replying to you. There are no "black lists" in newspaper offices,

but the bore and the time-waster are known all the same, and their time-wasting methods are boomerangs which recoil on their own heads.

If an editor thinks any ideas you suggest are promising, he will probably suggest an interview, or ask his news editor to do so. In that case be sure to be punctual. Remember that in Fleet Street time is cut so fine that a man may be free to callers at 3.20, and up to his eyes in his first edition five minutes later.

Unless you are desirous of obtaining consideration for a regular feature, it is better not to ask for an interview until you know that you can write the sort of thing that particular paper or magazine is requiring—in other words, until one or two of your articles have been accepted and printed.

When you have attained this modest measure of success, write to the literary or news editor according to whether your contributions are special articles for the "magazine page" or news stories. Your letter might take these lines:

*Dear Sir,*

*I thank you for your letter of the — inst., informing me that you are retaining my article," —," for publication.*

*As I have several further ideas for articles which I think may quite possibly interest you, would you be good enough to spare me a few moments one day this week, when I might call to see you? I should then know a little better just the kind of article most acceptable to you, and thus save us both time and trouble which otherwise might be spent over unsuitable suggestions.*

*Yours faithfully,*

Never lose an opportunity of becoming personally



acquainted with editors. Fleet Street is full of kind-hearted men, and although I would not for a moment suggest that any editor would buy an unsuitable article from a friend, or reject a suitable one because it came from someone unknown, yet, human nature being what it is, it is natural that an article from a contributor who is known should be read with a deeper feeling of good will than an article from a stranger. And given space for one article only in a particular issue, can it be doubted that the literary editor, forced to decide between two articles of equal merit, but only one of which was from a known and trusted contributor, would choose it in preference to the other? If neither article was topical, they would both be accepted, and one held over until space was available, but if topical, then the unknown writer would receive his article back.

One last word of advice to those who are approaching editors for the first time. Be sure you enclose a stamped and addressed envelope large enough to take the article folded in the same manner as when sent out by you, and if you don't receive a reply by return, don't send a letter threatening to sue the editor for neglect. He won't bother to read it. Remember that the same editor probably receives anything up to three hundred articles a day—many of which must be read once, twice, and perhaps three times before a decision can be made.

So be patient. If you are still without a reply in a month's time, send a polite reminder asking for a decision, and you will probably get one by return.

There is one exception to this advice. That is in the case of articles or interviews of extreme topicality. In this case a personal call at the newspaper office; if it can

be managed, is the best method. You may only see a messenger and not get as far as the editorial rooms the first time you call, but the article will in all probability be read while you wait, or at all events a decision sent you by the next post, and so enable you in the event of a rejection, to offer it elsewhere while it is still "red-hot news."

## CHAPTER VII

### HUMOUR AND VERSE

ALTHOUGH, as Charles Lamb says, a laugh is worth a hundred groans in any market, there does not at first sight appear to be a wide scope for the humorous journalist. The number of humorous papers is comparatively few, and outside these the market is difficult to gauge. Nevertheless, there is a keen demand for good humorous stuff. Every editor knows that the really funny story, article or paragraph is certain to appeal to his readers and is worth buying. On the other hand, it is not easy for the inexperienced contributor to determine what kind of humour is required.

A sense of humour is, in fact, an extraordinarily variable quantity. A joke that will convulse one man with laughter fails to raise a smile from another. "I don't see anything funny in that," is a phrase one hears again and again.

The keen and energetic free-lance is, however, naturally anxious to "try his hand" at humorous journalism. "The stuff looks easy enough to write," he thinks to himself. "I wonder if I have the knack of it." Accordingly he turns out something which may strike him as richly funny, and in an optimistic frame of mind sends

it along to *Punch*. Now, unless he happens to be the lucky one in a thousand who can produce saleable humour straight off the reel, it will come back to him with the usual regrets. A fair measure of success may have attended his efforts in other directions, but a few similar experiments will speedily convince him that the humorous field is not so readily captured.

It is, indeed, a branch of journalism which requires the most critical investigation, even if you are—which is unlikely—a born humorist.

The standard set by editors is a high one, and unless they are confident about a contribution it invariably finds its way back to the author. To the uninitiated selecting humorous articles, paragraphs and verse may appear a simple job; in reality it is a delicate and exceedingly difficult process.

A vast amount of nonsense is talked about "what the public want." The public, which in any case is unable to voice its collective requirements, demonstrates clearly enough what it likes. The popularity of humorous papers reflects the public's taste. If their contents did not appeal, the reading public would keep its money in its pockets and humorous papers would disappear from the market.

Therefore the young writer should carefully study and keep in touch with the leading humorous publications. He will learn more about the job of being funny in print by an intelligent examination of the contents of *Punch*, *Passing Show*, *London Opinion* and *The Humorist* than by any other means. A casual survey of one or other of these papers is not enough. He must keep in close and continuous touch with his markets.

It will soon become obvious that one editor's meat is another editor's poison, *i.e.*, what is suitable for *Passing Show* may be—probably is—totally unsuitable for *Punch*. There is a fine line drawn between the various brands of humour. *Punch*, of course, holds a unique position and probably owes its greatness not so much to the merit of its literary and artistic humour as to the sustained excellence of its cartoons. In a long series of famous cartoons, *Punch* has never failed to strike the right note. In this respect it is probably more truly representative of the spirit of the British people than any other paper. By tradition, *Punch* attracts the best writers and the best articles, and the ambitious writer will do well to bear in mind that he is flying at high game when submitting his efforts to *Punch*. I hope I shall not discourage the beginner from sending his MSS. to *Punch*, but I am probably right in thinking that the saying, "It's good enough for *Punch*," has been responsible for considerable editorial agitation in Bouverie Street when some of our amateur humorists (alleged) get on the warpath.

*Punch* is really more than a humorous paper; it is an institution. It has a large quota of regular contributors, which include A. P. Herbert, Anthony Armstrong, A. A. Milne, "Evvoe," E. V. Lucas, Sir Owen Seaman (its editor) and Thomas Jay. To appear in print in the pages of *Punch* is a hallmark.

How does *Punch* compare, you may ask, with the other humorous weeklies? In the first place, *Punch* has a classical tradition behind it. Its humour is always well-bred and correct, sometimes even austere. It is edited with a nicety of touch and polish which is almost

a contrast to its breezier contemporaries. *Passing Show* and *London Opinion* are broader, possibly a little more plebeian in outlook. One detects rollicking high spirits in their contents.

A study of the market for humour will readily enable the beginner to determine, roughly at any rate, with what kind of contribution he may hope to make headway. It is a good plan to analyse for one's own benefit the contents of current issues of the various humorous papers.

In recommending this I have not lost sight of the fact that editors are always on the look-out for "something new." But the writer who concentrates on supplying editors with something entirely fresh and original will, I fear, find his output lamentably small. Really original ideas, like good men, are hard to find. An occasional "brain-wave" may be very profitable, but it is better to submit stuff on the lines of published contributions if one is aiming at a regular source of income. A new twist to an old idea will almost invariably deliver the goods in the shape of a cheque.

An analysis of published humour will reveal certain definite classifications. First, there is the topical humorous article or paragraph which depends for its effect on something "in the news"—maybe a recent discovery or invention, or the utterance of someone in the public eye. This may take the form of a skit or satire.

The market limitations of this type of MS. are obvious. No time should be lost in submitting anything of this kind, as the subject rapidly loses its topical value. Another point to bear in mind is that the same bright

idea has probably occurred in the meantime to several other enterprising free-lances—*verb. sap.*!

The non-topical article—of which *Punch* prints a large number—may deal with an infinite variety of subjects which never fail to yield a fresh humorous aspect, *e.g.*, golf, spelling, fiction, children, etc. These and many other perennial topics provide abundant material for articles which have the advantage of being saleable at any time. It is astonishing with what frequency an old topic can be approached from a new angle. The treatment of such articles is important and should be carefully studied. It will be observed that *Punch's* humour is leisurely and urbane compared with the more boisterous methods of the other weeklies. I stress this point in order to dissuade the impetuous beginner from indiscriminate methods of production. The writer should be so thoroughly familiar with different editorial tastes—at least in a market so restricted as this—that he should be able to decide unhesitatingly to which of the humorous journals his MS. will be submitted. Rarely will the same MS. be suitable for more than two papers. If it is rejected by the more promising markets, it will obviously have to be revised, perhaps rewritten before it can be submitted to the others.

The problem of treatment takes us a step further in an analysis of published humour. Truisms are so often overlooked that I make no apology for pointing out that what editors want is something funny. They want to make their readers smile.

Now, you can make your reader smile in two ways, either (a) at himself or (b) at someone else. If the smile is not a wry one (a) is the method that finds more favour

with editors. To expose the little foibles and weaknesses of human nature, the absurd idiosyncrasies which we all possess, will vastly entertain the average reader who recognises himself in the humorous portrait. For this reason it must be done with a very light and good-natured touch. The exasperating loss of a train or a collar-stud, the determined disguise of a honeymoon couple, the perversity of the telephone, the rapacity of seaside landladies, these are a few of the innumerable little commonplace occurrences which come within the range of ordinary personal experience. Dr. Johnson probably owes much of his popularity to his little human weaknesses of storing up old orange peel and hitting posts with his stick as he walked down Fleet Street.

Good-natured burlesque is nearly always enjoyed, but the fun must not be spiteful or malicious. The mere satirist can never gain a wide measure of popularity or appreciation. For every admirer of Swift there are a dozen admirers of Lamb. Dickens's joyous caricatures will outlive Thackeray's merciless portraits. The most lovable humorist is he who digs deep down into human nature and reveals its genial, glowing and amusing side. Little human incidents are always cropping up to provide a fruitful source for the humorous journalist. "The very essence of humour is that it must be without malice," says Mr. Thomas Jay, the well-known contributor to *Punch*. "Let it be good-natured fun, calculated to send some poor soul on his way rejoicing that this is not such a bad old world after all. Let it be humour that does not leave any sting behind it, does not revive some bitter memory of the past. Let it leave no pang of remorse. Let it be aimed at bringing a little sunshine



into a drab workaday life. And, above all, do not let it be humour at the expense of some poor wretch who cannot retaliate, for humour ceases to be humour when it is made by the strong at the expense of the weak."

Is this branch of journalism worth specialising in? I think it is if results are promising, but any journalist of experience who fails to win editorial recognition will probably be wise to face the fact that humour is a gift of the gods and not to be acquired by assiduous practice. From a money-earning point of view, however, the humorous journals are well worth cultivating. The standard of remuneration compares very favourably with other markets.

I am inclined to think that the genuine humorist is born, not made. Careful and intelligent study of modern editorial requirements and "playing the sedulous ape" to humorous writers of established reputation may bring your efforts within measurable reach of publication standard, but unless the real humorous germ is in your work no amount of intensive cultivation will do the trick.

Humorous journalism also provides a useful jumping-off ground. Many well known writers have won their spurs in the pages of *Punch* and its competitors. Mr. A. A. Milne was an outside contributor before he joined the editorial staff of *Punch*, and now, as everyone knows, he has blossomed into a highly successful playwright. Mr. Charles McEvoy, author of *The Likes of 'er*, also graduated as a free-lance journalist in this field. Writing for the humorous press develops a lightness and crispness of touch which is invariably valuable and teaches

the budding writer to keep to the point. There is no room for irrelevancies or redundancies in humorous journalism.

From the two-line paragraph which earns the free-lance half a crown or three shillings, to the two or three hundred word skit, and from the humorous sketch to the humorous short story is not a far stretch. And the really funny short story is very much in demand. The writer with a vein of humour in his composition should never lose sight of the enormously lucrative possibilities of short story writing. A great deal can be learned from the methods of successful stage and radio comedians and from a study of the published work of humorists of established reputation like W. W. Jacobs, "Saki" (H. H. Munro), Stephen Leacock, William Caine, P. G. Wodehouse, Denis Mackail, Reginald Arkell, A. A. Milne, Maurice Lane-Norcott, F. W. Thomas, A. A. Thomas, "Evie," and others. A careful analysis of their methods to ascertain how different humorous effects are obtained will generously repay the ambitious young writer.

The increasing space given to magazine features in the newspapers, and especially in the Sunday papers, has greatly extended the boundaries of humorous journalism. Some of the best and highest-paid humour appears in newspaper columns. D. B. Wyndham Lewis and Maurice Lane Norcott are frequent contributors to the *Daily Mail*; K. R. G. Browne writes a regular (and extremely witty) humorous feature in the London *Evening News*; "Beachcomber" in the *Daily Express*; Thomas Jay in the *Sunday Dispatch*; F. W. Thomas in the *Star*; and there are other well known humorists

who make a regular appearance in the *Sunday Chronicle*, *Sunday Pictorial*, *Sunday Graphic*, etc.

Yet another profitable market for humour exists in the popular weeklies. *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Pearson's Weekly* and other periodicals carry humorous features and sketches as well as short columns and half columns of a topical nature. In these papers the features are mostly concerned with one or more characters, whose adventures and misadventures provide a weekly laugh, e.g., "Mrs. May," by T. Le Breton (of "A Sister to Assist 'er" fame) who amused readers of *Answers* for many years; and Miss Mabel Constanduros, whose work has also appeared regularly in that paper. Those who study the humour of the popular weeklies will observe that what is required is a broader variety, more akin to the music-hall, than the subtler brand favoured by the specialist humorous weeklies. In fact the various types of humour descend from *Punch*, at one end of the scale, to the jokes of the penny "comics" at the other, and somewhere between those extremes there is a market for anything that is genuinely funny. Real humour is always in demand—the difficulty of finding it ensures a good rate of payment in this least crowded and most exacting field open to the free-lance.

Verse is an important feature in the make-up of the humorous weeklies. There is always a good market for light, topical verse. *Punch* includes about six pieces of verse, varying in length, in each issue, *London Opinion* at least one, *Passing Show* two or three. Annuals like *Printers' Pie*, *Help Yourself*, *Pears' Annual*, and, of course, the special issues of the humorous journals provide a good field for light verse. An excellent feature

to study is "Rhymes of the Times" in the London *Evening News*. The following, which I reprint with the author's kind permission, is a characteristic specimen

"TO A PROPHECY.

" You said there would be snow or sleet  
 And cold enough to freeze the gizzard  
 I put my gumboots on my feet  
 And sallied forth upon the street,  
 Expecting a tremendous blizzard.  
 I found no howling Arctic storm ;  
 The day, in fact, was moist and warm.

" While stewing in my coat of fur  
 I own I felt a bit disgusted;  
 But accidents no doubt occur,  
 And I admit, prophetic sir,  
 Our weather never can be trusted,  
 Since Nature's spite too often mars  
 Your neatly-plotted isobars.

" And I myself, when I forecast  
 What next will be the situation  
 In politics, oft stand aghast  
 To know the truth. Things move so fast,  
 But then I have this consolation,  
 My prophecies I never tell  
 Until I see them doing well."

The work of J. Jefferson Farjeon, a well known contributor to *London Opinion* and other papers, is also an admirable index to editorial requirements. Many of the leading lyric writers have used the humorous papers as a stepping-stone to more substantial success in the theatrical world. Verse-writing imparts a lightness and delicacy of touch which may be turned to useful account in writing prose. The basis of verse is rhythm,

and any writer whose style is inclined to be heavy or stodgy ought to practise the art of writing light verse. He will then learn, as David Wilson once said, to "make words form fours."

The periodical market for "straight" verse is, however, very limited. Poetry, of course, is a thing apart from journalism. If a man has genuine poetry in him no advice of a journalistic nature ought to influence him. The market for poetry and verse of good quality is well defined—the *London Mercury*, *Adelphi*, *English Review*, *Poetry Review*, *Time and Tide*, *Spectator*, *Aphrodite*, *Argosy Magazine*, etc.—and is probably well known already to the poet who is anxious to see his work in print. The point is that poetry cannot be regarded entirely from a commercial standpoint. As Hazlitt said: "Poetry is not a branch of authorship: it is 'the stuff of which our life is made.'"

It is not my business to defend the claims of verse as opposed to poetry. Much of the verse which is published in the magazines is pretty poor stuff, I admit. The brutal truth is that if a story or an article runs out shorter than was anticipated, a piece of verse, mildly sentimental for preference, is conveniently measured up by a ruler and inserted as a "fill-up." Bearing this in mind, the writer who includes verse in his literary output will keep it as short as possible. The usual price paid for verse is a flat rate of 10s. 6d.

In addition to the monthly fiction magazines, verse is occasionally published by the *Sunday Times*, *Observer*, *Country Life*, *Blackwood's* and a number of the more serious reviews.

Books that would be useful to the would-be writer

of verse are : *The Craft of the Poet*, by F. W. Felkin (Allen and Unwin) ; *Handbook of Modern English Metre*, by J. B. Mayor (Cambridge University Press, 2s.) ; *How to Write Verse*, G. F. H. Northcroft (Smith's Publishing Company, 2s. 6d.) ; *Lessons in Verse Craft*, S. Gertrude Ford (Daniels, 4s. 6d.).

But to the average writer verse represents only a slight addition to his income and is emphatically not worth concentrating on. It isn't Art and it certainly isn't profitable—to him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PICTORIAL JOURNALISM

AN unkind critic once said that the *Daily Mail* was produced for the benefit of those who couldn't think for themselves and the *Daily Mirror* for those who couldn't read. Both journals have survived the jibe, needless to say.

The picture paper has undoubtedly come to stay. Its growth is one of the most remarkable developments of modern journalism. In the old days an accident was described in one or two long columns of type. To-day the tendency is to tell the story in pictures. Most of the leading dailies now feature a page of pictures and the illustrated weeklies are more popular than ever.

Although photographs can never entirely supersede letterpress, the public demand for a big proportion of illustration is likely to be permanent. We live in an age of hustle, and a picture of the havoc caused by an earthquake or of the Royal Family in the enclosure at Ascot is tabloid journalism at its best. A photograph tells a story or describes a scene with a terse effectiveness which verbal description can never hope to rival. There are also two popular prejudices which have to be taken into account : a latent suspicion of all that appears in

print and an unwavering faith in the tradition that the camera cannot lie. Both prejudices are equally absurd, for every journalist knows, first, that no reputable paper will ever print what it doesn't believe to be true and, second, that it is as easy to fake a negative or print as to spill ink. However, an authentic photograph is as convincing as journalism can be.

The man who turns to pictorial journalism is obviously the man who owns and can use a camera. Photography is a hobby which can be turned to very profitable account by the ordinary free-lance, and a substantial income may be earned by anyone who is able and willing to specialise in press photography. A photographic "scoop" may easily bring the free-lance a hundred pounds for a single picture.

The two chief requirements for a successful pictorial journalist are an instinct for press pictures and technical ability to produce them. Just as the ordinary journalist should have "a nose for news," the photographer must have an eye for pictures. This is largely a matter of instinct, but it is possible to develop a latent faculty for diagnosing press possibilities in a picture. Even expert photographers are sometimes totally incapable of combining this faculty with their technical skill and, if they are wise enough to recognise it, refrain from wasting their time in topical journalism at any rate. It is hopeless to free-lance unless you have a clear understanding of what editors want.

The simplest and most practical way of finding out what art editors want is to study the leading picture papers. In daily journalism, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Sketch* head the list, being primarily picture papers.



Next come the provincial picture papers, such as *The (Glasgow) Bulletin*.

In addition, all the London dailies, and most provincial dailies now devote one or more pages to pictures as a regular feature. The London *Evening News* gives one large page of pictures, and the *Evening Standard* and *Star* two pages daily.

The *Sunday Pictorial* and *Sunday Graphic* are the leading Sunday illustrated papers. The *Sunday Express* and *Sunday Dispatch* also feature a picture page in every issue.

Then come the weeklies of general interest, the *Illustrated London News*, *Sphere*, *Graphic*, *Tatler*, *Bystander*, *Sketch* and *The Queen*. Outdoor illustrated weeklies are the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, *Country Life* and *The Field*. In addition to these, there is a large number of publications (some of which I shall refer to later) which feature photographs. It will be seen, therefore, that the field of pictorial journalism is almost as wide as the press itself. It may be said to-day that every picture having a topical and popular interest can be sold somewhere, and often many times over.

A casual glance at the contents of these papers is not enough. Their pictures must be studied systematically. It is a good plan to prepare for one's own information a comparative analysis of the subjects illustrated. It doesn't take long to jot down in a notebook a brief description of the different types of photographs published, and such a record is invaluable in determining editorial requirements.

Newspaper editors chiefly want news photographs. This is possibly the most important branch of the

free-lance photographer's activities and is certainly the most remunerative. A knowledge of what constitutes news is, of course, almost indispensable. There are certain functions which yield a regular news supply, social, political, sporting, and so on. A very important item of the news photographer's equipment is therefore a diary. He must know a week or two beforehand of any important function which will be attended by press photographers, so that he can be fully prepared and equipped. The newspapers themselves will usually give all the necessary information in good time, but the prudent journalist arms himself with *Whitaker's Almanack*, some good books of reference, a Sporting Calendar, etc.

In addition to these regular events there are the ordinary happenings of the day, accidents, people in the news, athletes in training, scenes of murders, fires, and burglaries and so on, all of which give the enterprising free-lance plenty of scope.

At this point the beginner may well remark, "But surely this is the close preserve of professional press photographers?" It is quite true that where news pictures are concerned the free-lance has to compete with staff photographers, but it will encourage the amateur to learn that a large proportion of photographs published is the work of outside contributors.

Before we deal with the way to obtain pictures, let us go more fully into the question of what editors want.

In the first place, the newspaper editor wants pictures which tell a story. One picture "in action" is worth a dozen without movement. I believe that it is a rule

of the *Daily Mail* Art Department never to publish a "stationary" photograph when an "action" picture could have been obtained. To give an illustration. A picture of a steeplechase must show the horses in the act of jumping a fence, or in the act of falling, or passing the winning post. A mere portrait of the winner (which may have been taken long before the race) is comparatively worthless. A group of notable people laughing and chatting together at a garden party is much more effective than a few individual studio portraits.

This means that the photographer must choose the right moment for taking his picture. If, for instance, a big chimney is going to be destroyed, the news value of the picture lies in a snapshot of the *falling chimney*. Photographs of the chimney before and after are useless. "Action" pictures, then, are the first requirement of the newspaper.

The next essential—and an even more important one—is that the photograph should be *topical*. In Chapter III I pointed out that the value of news rapidly dwindles with the passing of even a few hours. The same principle applies to news pictures. The interest of your photographs must be immediate; if your subject is the least bit stale when it is submitted your work has been in vain. The secret of success in news photography is to be first in the field and first to deliver your stuff.

The free-lance often has a few hours' start of the staff man. If you live in Portsmouth and a serious fire breaks out in the Dockyard, you may be sure that within a few minutes of the news reaching Fleet Street, camera men will be hurrying to the spot as fast as express trains and cars can carry them. Here is your opportunity.

At once take, say, a dozen different pictures, decide on the papers to send them to, and without waiting to develop the plates, wrap them up carefully, clearly indicating the nature of the undeveloped plate, and send them off by train addressed to any one of the big picture news agencies in London, *e.g.*, Central News, Topical Press, Photopress, or London News Agency, who will collect the plates immediately and circulate the pictures to all the London and provincial papers. These agencies have a fixed working basis for free-lance photographs, usually fifty per cent.—fifty per cent. on each side, or sometimes sixty per cent. to the agency and forty per cent. to the photographer, the circulation costs being paid by the agency. If you wish to deal independently, you can, of course, send the plates direct to the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, etc., dispatching a telegram to the Art Department of each newspaper, advising them of the nature of your photographs and the time of the delivery at Waterloo. You will, of course, have to bear personally the expense of transmission and telegraphing, but the experiment may be worth while, although I am personally in favour of the agency plan. A “scoop” of this kind is a splendid passport to future editorial favour.

It may reasonably be argued that such a lucky (!) local accident as a dockyard catching fire is not likely to happen very often. True; but wherever you live you should always be on the *qui vive* to cover your own locality for photographic copy and thus steal a march on the professionals.

The biggest press photographic scoop on record was the achievement of an amateur. This was the famous

photograph of the attempt to assassinate the King of Spain on the occasion of his marriage to Princess Ena of Battenberg. The photograph shows the scene at the exact moment of the bomb bursting. It was taken by a spectator who was exposing a plate to obtain a record of the bridal pair and was fortunate enough to choose the precise moment when the bomb was thrown. The resulting photograph has become historic and has appeared in hundreds of papers throughout the world; thereby proving that in press photography the test is not whether you are a professional or an amateur, but whether you can handle a camera well and be at the right spot at the right moment. In other words, whether your news sense is highly developed.

As a general rule the amateur receives as much consideration as the staff photographer when he wishes to take pictures. A little experience will soon teach the beginner when he is likely to require a press permit. This is necessary for most functions of importance; and if he is wise the free-lance sends in his written application for a permit at the earliest opportunity, for the number of press permits is often limited, and it is usually a case of first come, first served. It is always as well to obtain permission before entering private property, otherwise you may make it difficult for any other photographer who may want to visit the scene of action after you.

If as a free-lance you have established a connection between yourself and any well known paper, it is not at all a bad plan to ask permission to have the paper's name printed on your cards. This will often admit you as a privileged person where your amateur status might keep

you outside. On the whole, press photographers, both professional and free-lance, are a very courteous body of men and nowadays few people resent a camera being levelled at them. The words "press photographer" are usually sufficient to take you anywhere, but a free-lance should always give way to a staff photographer whenever opportunity occurs. You will find he will help you in return.

To return to the news photograph. We can summarise essentials as follows: the picture should be (a) an action picture; (b) of immediate topical interest; (c) technically excellent. And speed in dispatch is vitally important. By technical excellence I mean successful photography and I shall refer to this later when dealing with equipment.

The number of pictures which come into the category of "immediate topical interest" is naturally restricted. You have only to glance at a newspaper a few days old to verify this statement that news photographs very rapidly become stale. The Sunday newspapers, although supposed to cover the news of the week, will be found on examination to concentrate on the happenings of the latter part of the week. Photographs of people, places and incidents in Monday's or Tuesday's news do occasionally find their way into the Sunday picture papers, but usually for one of two reasons, either because their topicality is sustained or because the photographs themselves are of uncommon or exclusive interest.

There is, however, a wide market apart from the newspaper press. The illustrated weeklies cover a very wide range of interests and materially enlarge the scope of the press photographer's activities. The same necessity for pictures of red-hot topicality does not

exist ; and provided a subject is not likely to be stale for at least a week after publication it will pass muster with the editor of an illustrated weekly if the photography is of the requisitely high standard. A pictorial weekly can never excuse poor reproduction on the score of having to go to press in a hurry and under difficulties ; therefore good prints are essential.

The requirements of the weeklies are best determined by a close and constant supervision of their contents, and the photographer should make a point of studying his market, notably the *Illustrated London News*, *Sphere* and *Graphic*, which are more pictorial in character than the *Sketch*, *Bystander* and *Tatler*. All these papers are anxious to secure high-class pictures appealing to a wide circle of readers. Then there are many illustrated weeklies of feminine and sporting interest to which the diligent press photographer can submit his pictures.

Here it should be added that just as articles are divided into lengths according to the interest and importance of the subjects dealt with, so press photographs may be divided into "solus" pictures and "sets" of exposures which illustrate one topic. An example of the way in which the free-lance may hope to sell a set of six or more photographs would be illustration of an industrial process—whether it be the building of London's motor buses, work in a beet sugar factory, or the making of a gramophone record. An exclusive set of such photographs will often suggest an article to an editor, for good and original illustrations are even more difficult to find than original articles. In the case of photographs illustrating industry, the possibility of publication of

the photographs in trade papers and their use in advertising the product concerned should not be overlooked.

A word about the times of going to press. The morning newspapers, although actually printing at midnight, usually close for press, as far as photographs are concerned, at about 6 p.m., to allow time for blocks to be made. The actual time naturally varies in the case of individual papers, and the outside contributor should make it his business to obtain and record this information for his own guidance. The weeklies' press day is usually Monday, and only photographs of exceptional interest are accepted after that day.

In addition to London papers, there is a big field for the press photographer in the provinces. Many provincial papers accept photographs from outside sources. The London offices (most important provincial newspapers have offices in Fleet Street) are open to receive prints for transmission to the head office. The chief provincial papers which accept pictures are the *Manchester Guardian*, *Leeds Mercury*, *Western Morning News*, *Sheffield Independent*, *Glasgow Daily Record*, *Sheffield Telegraph*, *Birmingham Daily Mail*, *Western Mail*, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, *Liverpool Courier*, *Dundee Courier*, *Glasgow Bulletin*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Yorkshire Observer*, *Newcastle Chronicle*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Darlington Echo*, etc.

The addresses of these and other papers and agencies mentioned in this chapter may be found in *Willings' Press Guide* (2s. 6d.) or *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book* (3s. 6d.), two books of reference invaluable to every working journalist. The London newspapers pay freelance press photographers a guinea or half a guinea



according to the size of the reproduction. The recognised press photographic agencies receive a higher minimum fee. Payments for photographs in provincial papers are usually half the London rates.

A point of great importance to the amateur is that the same picture can be submitted simultaneously to as many papers as he wishes. A dozen prints can thus be circulated at the same time. Editors cannot expect exclusive pictures at ordinary rates. As soon as the free-lance photographer has established some sort of connection he can of course dispose of many of his pictures exclusively, in which case the remuneration he may expect is about three or four guineas a picture. A really "big" picture is always worth selling exclusively—as it may realise anything up to a hundred pounds or even more. The ordinary practice, however, is to circulate the same print to different papers. Where news photographs are concerned, obviously the first papers to approach are the two all-picture papers, then the important London dailies, and finally the provincial newspapers. The weeklies are, however, the mainstay of the press photographer, for their requirements are less exacting and nearly all the photographs they use are obtained from outside contributors.

If the subject is interesting and the photograph good, it is nearly always possible to place a print sooner or later. Bearing this in mind, the photographer should never destroy a good print. A good system of card-indexing is advisable. A record should also be kept of published pictures, for the opportunity of commissioned work may occur, and it is useful to be able to produce for editorial inspection a record of past achievements.

The monthly magazines no longer offer the scope of twenty years ago. Fiction is crowding out the illustrated article, but there are still a number of popular magazines which are open to accept well-illustrated articles. *The London*, *Pearson's Magazine*, *Royal Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Windsor*, *Strand*, and the *Wide World* contain a more or less substantial proportion of photographically illustrated articles.

In this branch of pictorial journalism a knowledge of the literary requirements of the different magazines is practically indispensable, for the illustrated article is usually an individual contribution. Where photographs are specially obtained to illustrate an article or interview, editors usually fall back on the recognised agencies whose elaborate and classified stocks of photographs enable them to meet editorial requirements at a few hours' notice.

The two types of magazine article which lend themselves most favourably to illustration are the article of specialised interest and the interview.

An article on "Salmon and Trout Angling," for instance, would indicate the desirability of a connected series of photographs which probably the author himself could supply, and it will be readily seen that half a dozen photographic reproductions at even half a guinea apiece may add materially to the payment for the article itself. Similarly, any article that tells a story, *e.g.*, "How a Book is Made," could be suitably illustrated by one's own photographs.

An excellent example of the way in which journalism and photography may go hand in hand is to be found in a series of articles by Abbé, the well-known photographer-

traveller, which appeared in the *London Magazine*. Each article dealt with impressions of a country visited by the author and was accompanied by photographs illustrating the text. The photographs added considerably to the interest of the story—they were indeed indispensable.

Illustrations add greatly to the interest of the text in the records of explorers and travellers like Major and Mrs. Court Treatt and Mr. Errol Hinds, whose photographs of their adventures with a camera on the track of big game in Africa were reproduced in many papers.

The illustrated interview is a feature of perennial interest in the magazines, and a combination of enterprise, (*i.e.*, in approaching the subject of the interview, literary ability, and photographic skill is very profitable. As a rule, it is wise to submit a preliminary letter to the editor of the magazine to which you propose to send the article. There is usually an element of topicality in articles of this nature, the subject of the interview probably looming large (temporarily) in the public eye.

It is well worth while doing interviews, for although the attempt sometimes involves a certain amount of wasted time and inconvenience, if you can satisfy an editor on one occasion, there is every possibility that it may lead to commissioned work of a similar nature.

Photographic supplements—nowadays often produced in photogravure—are a feature of some of the high-class magazines. These are either scenic or comprise portraits of celebrities, usually actresses or film stars. The latter are, generally speaking, out of the range of the free-lance photographer, but an artistic series of scenes in, say, Japan or Spain (if you have travelled), or pictures of

spring and autumn in your own country, may well find acceptance. The amateur photographer who has never been nearer the Continent than Dover need not be discouraged. One young journalist of my acquaintance specialised in "artistic" snow scenes, produced some wonderful pictures (making hay *before* the sun shone!) and did a flourishing trade in the Christmas numbers. Enterprise reaps its own reward, and the man who has the courage to strike out in a line of his own (it needn't necessarily be an original line, either) will make infinitely quicker progress than his more conventional competitor.

We now come to the third, and not the least important requirement of the successful press photographer, *viz.*, technical ability. A practical knowledge of photography is absolutely necessary. Without the ability to make a good, clean negative, pictorial journalism is out of the question. I sound this note of warning for the benefit of the optimistic amateur who, having coaxed an occasional successful snapshot from his camera, imagines that he can compete with experts.

The camera itself is, of course, the item of outstanding importance in the photographer's equipment. A really good camera is expensive, but a cheap camera in the hands of a practised photographer is better than an expensive one in the hands of an amateur. The requirements of a good camera are briefly, a rapid lens, with a working aperture of not less than f 6.3 but preferably working at f 4.5 (as pressmen have to take their pictures in all weathers and a slow lens is useless on a dull day), and a direct view-finder. Elaborate fittings and attachments are neither necessary nor desirable. The time factor is of such vital importance in the taking of news

pictures that a camera of the "ready-at-once" type is best. Many experts are in favour of the focal-plane type, and five-inch by four-inch size is perhaps the most serviceable. The size of your prints should not be less than half-plate, and even then they may often require enlargement.

With regard to other details of equipment, *e.g.*, dark room outfit, formulæ for chemicals, plates, printing frames, paper, enlarging apparatus, and so on, I cannot do better than refer the reader to the photographic press, where he will find information both practical and up-to-date.

The pictorial journalist must, it is true, be a skilled craftsman, but he also has to be a salesman, and rapidity in circulating his prints, combined with discrimination in choosing his market, will materially assist him to win success in this direction. The difference between the photographer and the press photographer is the word "press." Only by diligent application to a study of the ever-changing requirements of the press can the photographer gain substantial recognition from editors.

## CHAPTER IX

### SELLING ABROAD

To sell abroad, an article or news story must fall into one of two categories. It must be of equal interest and importance to the public at home and in the foreign country in which it is offered, or it must be a contribution specially prepared for publication in some other country.

In the same way, the free-lance who wishes to add a "Foreign Department" to his activities must possess an up-to-date knowledge of what does—and what does not—interest the public of the country or countries with which he is anxious to establish journalistic relations.

A further fact which must be borne in mind is that everything offered abroad must be exclusive so far as the territory of that particular country is concerned. It is useless to sell an article with, say, a special interest to the people of New York in the ordinary way in this country and a month later offer it to a New York newspaper, and for this reason. Every large foreign newspaper, whether it is American, European, or Colonial, possesses a London representative, part of whose duties it is to keep a sharp look-out for news items or articles likely to interest the readers of his particular newspaper and "gut" them—that is, send along extracts of the most

interesting parts by cable to his editor. This practice is not so reprehensible as it sounds, for it is customary to make due acknowledgment of the British paper or magazine from which the extracts are "lifted." But the effect of this practice upon the unwary journalist's chances of selling that same article or story abroad are definite and final. Despite the fact that he has carefully safeguarded his interests at this end by selling only "First British Serial Rights" or "One Use Only" of the contribution which thus remains his copyright for selling as many more times as he can, it will be promptly returned to him by the foreign editor to whom it is submitted, with either a bald "rejection slip" or a letter intimating that the body of the article or story has already appeared in that country and that he is therefore unable to use it.

Actually if the contribution is sufficiently striking it is probable that it will have been "gutted" and cabled to the country concerned by some lynx-eyed correspondent over here within twenty-four hours of its appearance.

How can the free-lance safeguard himself against this mild and perfectly legal form of "piracy"? Fortunately for his financial prospects in the foreign markets there are two or three courses open to him by which he can reserve to himself the possible fruits of his labour in those countries which offer the best field for the British journalist.

The most obvious method, and the one most widely used, is simultaneous publication. When you can sell a contribution to, say, a London and New York newspaper and stipulate publication on or after a given "release" date, there is no danger of anyone "lifting" your article

or any part of it, at least until you have made what you can out of it both at home and abroad. This is usually quite easy to arrange, providing the article or news story is sufficiently striking to warrant an editor accepting your wishes in the matter of dates.

If, however, simultaneous publication cannot be arranged, or if you consider that there may be further markets for your effort you should copyright the article in all those countries in which your rights may be of value to you.

Here a general knowledge of the copyright laws in this and other countries is essential. So far as our own country is concerned, publication constitutes copyright of everything except facts, which cannot be copyrighted. For legal purposes, however, it is advisable to know just what a fact is from the point of view of copyright law.

For example, if you write an article in which you state that the dome of St. Paul's is ninety feet round, that is a fact and as such can be repeated in print by anyone, without violating any copyright. But if you write "the ninety-feet dome—like some vast bastion holding up the sky" and those same words appeared a few days later in another article, you would, if you wished, have a good case against the offender for breach of copyright, because he had "lifted," not the fact, which is anybody's property, but your style, which belongs to you alone or to the particular newspaper to which you may have sold it.

The whole question of copyright is covered by the Copyright Acts, which deal with both the British and International markets. Some practical aspects of this



important and intricate subject are dealt with in "The Commercial Side of Literature."

The United States is, next to our own, by far the most important market from the point of view of the free-lance. As the laws of that country now stand, full protection can only be obtained when a book has been completely printed and published there; but a measure of protection may be secured by lodging a copy of a work published in another country at the Library of Congress, Washington, and on payment of a small fee, within sixty days of first publication; thereby obtaining interim copyright for a further period of four months from the date of registration. But as it is necessary to obtain the proper form from Washington on which to make the claim, the form should be obtained as early as possible, unless one's literary agent is looking after the matter. The copyright lapses after the expiration of the period indicated if the work is not in the meantime printed in America.

When the serialisation of Mr. Winston Churchill's book, *The World Crisis*, was arranged, the matter was copyrighted practically all over the world, and was subsequently published in over a dozen different countries. In the same way the world copyright for the Carnarvon and Howard Carter dispatches from the Valley of the Kings at Luxor concerning the finding of Tutankhamen's Tomb in 1923 was vested, by special arrangement, in *The Times*.

As these two examples indicate, however, it is only in the case of matters of outstanding importance that the average free-lance should worry about copyright law. It is valuable to possess the knowledge necessary

to protect your interests in case a polar explorer or inventor should divulge some startling discovery to you, or some politician should relate the inner secrets of a world crisis in an article you are fortunate enough to obtain. But this sort of luck comes the way of but few free-lances, and so for all practical purposes the method of simultaneous publication will prove adequate.

What countries offer the most promising market for the free-lance in Fleet Street? The answer is that almost any country where newspapers are published at all will buy news affecting the interests of their public, providing that it is exclusive, which means, as I have explained above, news which their own correspondents in London have been unable to get. But as the United States, our Dominions and Western Europe are the countries most closely affected by the course of life and events in Britain, it is natural that they should be the countries most worthy of consideration when discussing the question of selling abroad.

In the case of the United States the free-lance has a choice of two distinct methods of selling—outright to one newspaper, or syndication among from twelve to a hundred different papers through one of the great newspaper syndication services which are a prominent feature of American newspaperdom. This question of syndication is dealt with fully later in this chapter.

The problem before the free-lance in considering the American market is the choice of alternatives. He can sell his article, assuming of course that it is saleable at all, outright to one newspaper for anything from £25 to £100. To do this he has only to place it before one of the representatives of the great New York journals with

offices in London, who will either buy it at once, or, if he is doubtful, cable to his head office for instructions. On the other hand, he can offer it to the European representative of one of the syndicates, who will, if the article is of the sort likely to sell in all parts of America, probably offer to put it on their service to one hundred and fifty or more newspapers on a fifty-fifty basis, that is, half of the amount realised goes to the syndicate and half to you, while they take the risk of the article failing to produce enough to pay the cost of postage and stationery. It is a nice calculation, often, which method will produce the best financial results for the free-lancé, but as these vary every time and frequently from one week to another, it is not possible to lay down any hard and fast rules for the guidance of beginners beyond expressing the opinion that unless you get an offer from a single newspaper of at least three times the sum secured for the same article in this country, it will pay better, given any encouragement from the manager of the syndicate here in London, to adopt the alternative method and let the syndicate handle it for you.

In the case of our Dominions the first tip is to be sure you possess the necessary rights to enable you to sell to them. If you have accepted a cheque from the London newspaper or magazine for "British Empire Rights" instead of "British Rights Only" you cannot sell in the Dominions. In the same way, if you have agreed to give "North American Rights" to a newspaper or syndicate in the United States, this included Canada, and you cannot again sell the article in that country. These are by no means uncommon pitfalls which the free-lance must avoid if he believes his chance of selling

a particularly outstanding article in half a dozen countries is good. Syndication can be ruled out so far as our Dominions are concerned, and so can prices as high as those paid in London or New York.

The free-lance who has reached the stage of regularly selling his work in this country should not overlook the possibilities which exist in the Dominions and Colonies.

In recent years many British newspapers overseas have abandoned the time-honoured method of "lifting"—with acknowledgment—extracts from articles appearing in the London dailies, and now buy original work, or "rights" for their particular territories in material written for English papers. Good rates are paid when simultaneous publication can be arranged.

This question of Dominion and Colonial papers is a complicated subject and only the free-lance with some knowledge of the requirements of the papers approached or with important material to offer, can hope to find in them an outlet for his work. To the competent and well-informed journalist, however, they offer a promising and hitherto uncultivated field.

Generally speaking, contributions likely to interest papers overseas fall into two categories, being either original contributions on topics of special interest to readers in Canada, New Zealand, India or elsewhere or material important enough to be offered simultaneously here and in the Dominions, or (in the case of features) which can, with minor alterations, be made suitable for the readers of the various overseas dailies.

The latter method, when it can be arranged, is the most profitable. Here is an illustration. It occurred to a fashion expert attached to an English woman's paper

that women overseas might be interested to know what was being worn at home. She realised that while gathering information for her own paper she could also write a weekly column for other dailies, and accordingly wrote a specimen article, which she then sold a daily in the Far East. Then she syndicated it—that is, offered the same column with minor alterations to suit the various climates, to twelve other dailies as far apart as Canada, Africa and Shanghai. Five of them took the feature. The combined payment which she now receives for that regular column from six dailies works out at nearly twice the rate she is paid by the monthly magazine that prints her work here.

It is, however, useless to offer overseas any but really important articles or expert features. There is little scope for miscellaneous contributions. The subjects most likely to find favour are politics, sport, fashion, theatres, books, art—the topics, in short, which have a common interest for British peoples the world over. The separate territories which the free-lance approaches include Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, India, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Egypt. Most of the prominent dailies published in these countries have London offices or agents, where advice may be sought as to possible openings for contributions. Alternatively, the free-lance can write direct to the editor. It is of course advisable to state qualifications clearly. Remember also to allow for the necessary “time lag” in the delivery of “copy” or your information will be out of date before it reaches the sub-editor in Calcutta or Sydney.

In dealing with France, Germany, and other European countries, the free-lance is faced with the language

difficulty, which necessitates translation either in London or by a member of the staff of the newspaper concerned. It must also be remembered that the number of subjects concerning this country, or events here which are of sufficient importance to justify a Russian or French or German editor buying a special article from a British journalist, are comparatively few. This is proved by the fact that it is only on rare occasions that an article by a foreign journalist or celebrity appears in our newspapers, apart from the dispatches from foreigners who are appointed regular correspondents to a newspaper here. The reason is that in all but occasional instances the British correspondents scattered all over the world are able to collect all important news themselves, thus severely limiting the possible chances of the foreign free-lance. The same conditions confront the free-lance here. He has got to beat the American or French correspondents in London at their own game and secure something of considerable interest to the people of one or other of those countries absolutely exclusively before he stands any chance of selling in Paris or New York.

What type of article sells abroad? The question is difficult to answer, because the possibilities of foreign markets vary almost from day to day. What is utterly devoid of interest in, say, New York on one Monday may be eagerly snapped up the next. For instance, an article describing Mr. Ramsay MacDonald in private life, signed by a friend of the Premier, would have no special appeal to the American public. They are, of course, mildly curious about the principal figures on the British political stage, but normally that curiosity can

quite easily be satisfied by the cables sent by the American correspondents in London. But if that same article had been offered to an American newspaper a week before "Ramsay" landed at New York on his American tour it is very possible that it would have been bought at once.

A few years ago a London free-lance induced Senator Marconi to express certain opinions concerning the future of Wireless. This article he sold to a magazine for £20. Having "placed" it in this country he began to look round for an opportunity to sell it in the United States. The first journalist friend to whom he mentioned the matter advised him not to waste time. "I offered three papers a similar sort of article a few months ago and they all refused it," he added, "so why waste time on possible dollars in America when you can be earning pounds right here in Fleet Street?"

In spite of this discouragement the free-lance decided to try and sell the article across the Atlantic. He had two dozen copies typed and got an American syndicating service to agree to try it out for a commission of ten shillings on every pound collected. For three months he heard nothing. Then one day he received a cheque for £26, his fifty per cent. share of the proceeds of the sale of the article to fourteen newspapers.

When he told his friend, the latter could not believe it. Hadn't he tried to sell a wireless article in America a few months before and failed? If he had only known the American market as every free-lance should if he wants to sell abroad, he would have known it was those few months which made all the difference. The second article arrived in New York just as the great wireless

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When he told his friend, the latter could not believe it. Hadn't he tried to sell a wireless article in America a few months before and failed? If he had only known the American market as every free-lance should if he wants to sell abroad, he would have known it was those few months which made all the difference. The second article arrived in New York just as the great wireless

boom was sweeping America and everything bearing the word "wireless" was sure to sell somewhere. Hence the lucky free-lance who got in his article at the psychological moment made £26 for the trouble and cost of getting two dozen copies typed.

In other words, in selling abroad, as in selling at home, it is topicality that, on five occasions out of six, means the difference between failure and success where the free-lance is concerned.

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that all you have to do in order to sell an article abroad is to get six copies prepared and promptly sell them in as many different countries.

Some articles, and especially important signed ones, must, of course, be published exactly as passed by the celebrity whose signature appears on the original copy. But in the case of topical articles written by the free-lance himself, and possessing a special interest to the Dominions or the United States, they must be rewritten in accordance with the style usually followed in each country. Just as a column lifted bodily from the *Daily Mail* or *Manchester Guardian* would be unsuitable for the *New York Herald* or *Chicago Tribune* without being Americanised, so an article must be to a certain extent Canadianised or Africanised to sell it to the *Vancouver World* or the *Cape Times*. The alterations may not be extensive, and if the paper really likes the article the editor will often have the style altered by a sub-editor at his office, but a free-lance who has a rough knowledge of each paper he sells to, both abroad and at home, and of the style, length and general make-up and tone favoured in each case is more likely to make money abroad than the

journalist whose newspaper reading has been confined to the products of Fleet Street and the provinces.

When all has been said, however, it remains an indisputable fact that outside of his own country the United States offers by far the most promising field alike for both the known and the unknown British writer. And as more than half the money paid to British journalists by the United States is the return from articles and stories that have been syndicated up and down the States, a few additional facts about the syndication system may be useful.

The manager of one of the largest American newspaper syndicates recently summarised the requirements of the trans-Atlantic market in the five words, "Big names or outstanding merit." By "outstanding merit" he meant articles or stories that, whether known or unknown, would compel attention by their power. Mr. H. G. Wells, for instance, has, it is said, been paid as much as £200 per thousand words for articles intended for syndication both here and in the United States, while not long ago the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" stories were again "released" in America with success. These are examples of "big names." As an example of merit I may mention a young man who went round the world on a shilling. Wherever he touched in the course of his travels he managed to see things differently from the average unthinking traveller. The result was a rolling-stone narrative, brimful of new facts about this world of ours, which was eagerly bought by an American syndicate and as easily sold to a large number of newspapers in that country—newspapers which printed a brief life sketch of the author the week

before publication of his narrative began and hailed him as "a discovery." To-day that same man has a certain market in the United States for anything that he writes. That one series of "outstanding merit" raised him from the ranks of the "unknown" to a place of honour among American writers of travel.

America wants for syndication material which is either of peculiar topical interest to that country, or material which strikes a new note in her journalism. Syndicates do not want odd articles, however interesting, which might be turned out by some staff man in a New York or Chicago newspaper office. They can supply the demand for that sort of journalism themselves.

Given the right material, what sort of return may then be expected? I have already mentioned the case of a journalist who was paid £26 for his half-share of the proceeds of a wireless article. This figure may be taken as the average yield of a single article which proves suitable to the American market. Series that are well boomed beforehand may be expected to produce more.

Coming to individual papers, the prices paid to the syndicate are arranged on a sliding scale according to the importance of the newspaper and the territory covered. Thus a small paper in Ontario will pay £1 for the same article which in New York will on the same day be sold for £100, or in Minneapolis for £25. It all depends upon the standing of the paper concerned. This is a matter, however, which is arranged by the syndicate on the other side, and the free-lance may rely upon them making the best bargain they can, both in their own interests and his own. Successful syndication, as the term is used in the United States, means sales to from

fifteen to one hundred and fifty papers. In the case of Mr. Rudyard Kipling or Sir Philip Gibbs, a series of articles of anything from seven hundred to one thousand five hundred words apiece would quite easily sell to the maximum number of papers I have mentioned. Smaller men than these must be content with a more modest return for their labours—in some cases with only a few pounds an article, at least until they are known and have secured that indefinable thing—a “public”—for their wares.

But if the average return from syndication in the United States is compared with the rates paid in London of from £2 2s. to £6 6s. for the same sort of article or story, it will be found that the extra work involved in keeping the foreign market in view is amply repaid, even if the free-lance never achieves that exalted pinnacle reached by Sir Philip Gibbs, Rebecca West, Shaw Desmond, Frank Swinnerton, and other British writers, and is asked to cross “the herring pond” to lecture to his readers for fees which make even the return from syndicated articles seem of small account.

## CHAPTER X

### PUBLICITY AND PROPAGANDA—SYNDICATION

IN a sense all journalism is publicity. The publication of both news and views is publicity. Now, publicity itself, as the late Mr. St. Loe Strachey pointed out, may seem a neutral thing—an organ which the bad can use as well as the good. Propaganda follows naturally on the heels of opinion, and a newspaper which expresses and emphasises its own opinion on any matter of public interest is propagandist, but healthily so. While newspapers are independent there is more good than harm in this kind of publicity, but the syndication of the modern press means the disappearance of individual points of view and the widespread dissemination of the views of one single group of people or, worse, of one single individual. To this extent, the platform of the press has been bought by the highest bidders. It does not follow that millionaire proprietors will abuse their enormous power, but it is as well to recognise that the day of the healthy individual editorship is passing. Readers of the big dailies can no longer repose the same confidence in either the news or the opinions that they buy.

The rapid strides made by industry, finance and politics have inevitably complicated the expression

of news and opinions in print. The delicate mechanism of international finance, for instance, is profoundly affected by even the mere rumour of war, or strikes, or political changes. During the war the report of a British victory was enough to cause a big fluctuation in the respective values of British and German stock. The Stock Exchange has become an extremely delicate barometer and the press plays an important part in regulating its course.

Political parties, big industries, associations, individual trades and professions, in effect any body or group with anything to lose or gain protects its interests, nowadays, by propaganda. There is an Eastern proverb that ninety-nine silent men are ignored while the hundredth who uses his voice is heard. In these days propaganda is generally recognised as a legitimate weapon.

From the grocer who wants a "write-up" in a local newspaper to an international assembly like the League of Nations, there is a wide field in which the versatile free-lance journalist may hire his services. His identity is submerged, it is true, and he may often be called upon to express a point of view totally different from his own, but who will accuse the journalist who has to earn his bread and butter of immorality? In point of fact the majority of press campaigns are on the side of the angels: and even where they exploit a private or individual cause they are rarely harmful. A propagandist campaign is initiated for a variety of reasons: to convert the public, to destroy apathy, to arouse general interest, to expose an evil, to stimulate the sale of a product, even. To sum it up, it is a bid to gain popular approval. The

British public is supposed to be an ass, but it isn't, and few campaigns of this nature succeed unless there is behind them some solid justification for their initiation.

Although press campaigns, whether they be to encourage the fruit-eating or milk-drinking habit, or to prevent cruelty to animals trained for public performances, press into service many hundreds of journalists, it must be admitted that the unknown free-lance has few opportunities of working behind the scenes in this way. The supply of Fleet Street men of proved ability is nearly always greater than the demand. But there is nothing to prevent the young and ambitious writer from approaching big organisations and volunteering his services, and at the same time possibly submitting specimens of his work.

All publicity and propaganda are really indirect advertising, and there is no doubt that journalism and advertising are becoming more closely allied as time goes on. At any rate there is increasing scope for versatile journalists in the advertising field.

The essential points of difference between the editorial journalist and the advertising man are these: (1) In advertising the writer becomes identified with the product advertised; (2) he is temporarily a salesman on behalf of the product; (3) his style must be adapted to the requirements of modern advertising, *i.e.*, it must have "punch" and "pulling-power"—two terms familiar in the advertising world; (4) he must be capable of producing bright ideas with a fundamental "selling-point."

Advertisement "copy" is rising steadily in dignity, interest and human appeal. The old tub-thumping ideas have vanished. We live in an era when Royal



Academicians paint posters for railway companies. The advertising of to-day—and more particularly the advertising of to-morrow—will enlist the services of the best journalists as well as the leading artists. There is a great future in this branch of journalism—for no one can deny that it is journalism. After all, journalism is a trade, not an art, and advertising is an important ramification of commerce. It will attract especially the versatile journalist who feels he can produce crisp selling “copy” to order, and as the work is highly remunerative it is well worth the consideration of the ambitious free-lance.

With all its limitations, advertising will presently compete on very favourable terms with the editorial columns of our newspapers. The columns of “Callisthenes” (a feature of Selfridge’s advertising) are a notable instance of advertisements which vie in general interest with the literary matter of the papers in which they appear. Many other advertisers are beginning to realise that the way to get the public to read their announcements is to raise their literary standards. Everyone who has written advertisement “copy” is familiar with the slogan, “They (*i.e.*, the public) don’t want to read it!” Yet if Mr. G. K. Chesterton were persuaded to write an advertisement for someone’s beer or stout, it would, I venture to say, attract very wide attention.

And that is, I imagine, what will eventually happen. Writers of repute and versatile journalists will follow the example of eminent artists and harness themselves to the chariot of advertising. There are, of course, many instances of well-known journalists undertaking

advertisement work. The late George R. Sims frequently lent the prestige of his name and the talent of his pen in this way. The old idea that all advertisements were vulgar is fast disappearing. R. L. Stevenson enabled coming events to cast their shadows before when he said that if God sent someone round with a drum when the hawthorns were in flower everyone would flock out to see them. But even a drum has to be played properly ; and the journalist who can sound the note of human interest and appeal in his writing can be of inestimable service to the advertiser.

Naturally the novice will ask : " How can I get into touch with the advertiser who requires my services ? "

At this point it is well to bear in mind that nearly all national advertising campaigns are handled by firms of advertising agents. Mention of the leading firms is constantly being made in the trade papers, the *Advertising World* and the *Advertisers' Weekly*, and these should be carefully studied. Then, if the beginner thinks he has a good original idea for an advertisement, a striking slogan maybe, for a product which he knows is in the hands of an advertising agent, he should approach them with the idea. If dealing with a big firm, he need not hesitate to bring his idea to their notice in writing ; a reputable firm is always glad to pay for an acceptable suggestion.

This is the thin end of the wedge, and one or two accepted ideas have often paved the way to a lucrative appointment in the Copy Department of a big firm. Where a firm does its advertising direct, the advertising department may be similarly approached.

Another phase of publicity which the experienced

journalist encounters sooner or later in his career is personal publicity. To some individuals publicity is the breath of life, and there is sound justification for the actor or author who, depending for his livelihood on the capricious favour of the public, engages an efficient press agent to ensure the constant appearance of his name in print.

Society people—nearly always women—are often bitten with this publicity bug. Any journalist who has the necessary influence to get articles, paragraphs and photographs published in well-known papers is eagerly sought after by these people, who will often pay lavishly for the satisfaction of appearing in print. At the present time there is, fortunately, a healthy tendency on the part of the most reputable papers to exclude personal publicity of this nature. In one leading newspaper office any paragraph emanating from a press agent is promptly thrust into a waste-paper basket or curtly referred to the advertisement department.

Legitimate publicity is, however, a different matter. An article or paragraph containing information of interest to the public will often be published by an editor in disregard of the fact that such publicity may be immensely valuable to the subject of the article. For instance, an article about a prominent novelist or actress which isn't too emphatically a "boost" of their work is always welcome if it throws new and interesting light on their personalities. The public is naturally interested in its favourites. Similarly, an article about any public man or woman, politician, sportsman, explorer or lawyer, is often acceptable. The topical touch is usually important. For instance, if Lord Lonsdale had

the misfortune to fall and break his leg, a pen-picture of his lordship "by one who knows him" (especially if he is able to record some new and authentic details) comes under the heading of acceptable material.

Personal publicity, however, is the close preserve of the journalist who knows the ropes. The beginner is well advised to postpone all consideration of becoming a press agent. I doubt whether the press of this country will ever tolerate the vast publicity organisations of America, where editorial publicity has made great strides. There every big institution, from film corporations to fruit stores, has its own publicity department which sends out to the press a vast amount of literary matter, most of which, being written by professional journalists, is excellent reading. In this country publicity is confined to theatres, film companies, publishers, hotels, railways, and individuals, and is only permitted to exist on a very mild scale.

There is another method of selling his wares which the enterprising free-lance cannot afford to overlook. I refer to syndication.

After being neglected in this country for years, this question of syndication, or regional selling of the same article or story to a number of different papers covering various parts of the country for simultaneous publication, is at last engaging the attention that it deserves.

To see the syndication system in full working order in a favourable atmosphere you must turn to the United States, the home of syndication, but the American side of the question has already been dealt with fully in the previous chapter "Selling Abroad," and here I must confine my attention to the home market.

Even in Great Britain syndication has made bigger inroads since the war than most journalists realise. In 1914 this method of marketing stories and articles was confined to two or three agencies which supplied the smaller country newspapers with features costing only a few shillings a column. To-day such a literary "big gun" as Mr. H. G. Wells has been syndicated not only in the United States, but here at home. A few years ago a series of weekly articles from his pen appeared simultaneously in a number of newspapers as far apart in their field of operations as London, Sheffield, and Scotland.

The truth is that writers possessing foresight are beginning to realise the enormous possibilities of this method of selling. Not only does it carry a writer into markets which he would not otherwise be able to enter without severely cutting his minimum rates of payment, but it enables the journalist to secure a larger share of the profits of his work than by writing for only one paper. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that syndication is the journalist's reply to the trustification of the popular newspaper press. Just as proprietors are gathering more and more papers under one ownership, so is the journalist turning more and more to the possibilities of writing for twenty papers at once instead of for one only.

That the need for syndication exists no one who has any detailed knowledge of the writing game will deny. Without mentioning names, it is common knowledge in Fleet Street itself that a number of the most virile writers have found it more profitable to write solely for the American Syndication Agencies and leave the

British market alone, than to accept the comparatively insignificant rates which are all the average British editor can offer to the ordinary journalist. I have heard of cases where writers were offered £10 each for articles which, when syndicated in eighty newspapers in the United States, produced £150. Under these circumstances a writer can hardly be blamed if he dismisses the British market from his calculations and writes exclusively for the United States, until an opportunity offers for his articles to appear in, say, a dozen British newspapers at £10 each, or £120 an article.

I have been speaking of the writer whose name carries weight and prestige. But syndication possesses the same importance for the free-lance whose fame is yet to come.

Taking our London newspapers as a whole, I suppose the average rate of remuneration offered for news stories, "specials," and short articles is from two to four guineas per thousand words, according to the newspaper concerned.

Now let us examine the financial possibilities of syndication, bearing in mind that although this method is expanding every year, it has got to go a lot further in this country before it can play a large part in the income of the average free-lance.

At present the prices charged by the agencies handling syndicated articles in Britain vary according to the locality in which the article will circulate. For instance, the rights to publish an article in London and the Home Counties is obviously worth more than the rights to publish the same article in Cornwall or Lincolnshire. The method employed, therefore, is to fix an approximate

price for each region where the article or articles are to appear, and then to sell it at these varying prices, or a price as near that figure as possible. An article which is worth five guineas for "Home Counties Rights" will only be worth five shillings in parts of Wales and Scotland. It is a matter of population, circulation, and the relative importance of the newspaper concerned.

But this need not worry the journalist. The agency handling his articles will see to this for him. What is of more importance to him is what he may expect to receive from an averagely successful experiment in syndication.

Let us suppose, therefore, that he has succeeded in securing a series of three articles on the British Navy, signed by a former First Lord of the Admiralty. This sort of article makes good interesting reading in any part of the country, so it should sell well. When he receives his accounts from the agency he will probably find that the articles have been sold to twelve or thirteen newspapers. Let us say a dozen papers have bought them. The highest price paid will be about £5 5s. for the London area and the lowest about £1 for the north of Scotland. Altogether the amount realised from each article would be probably somewhere between £30 and £40. (I am assuming that each article is of a thousand words.) The total amount realised, therefore, for the series is £120, of which the agency takes either fifty per cent or less, according to the arrangement made for handling the work.

Sixty pounds for three thousand words, apart from valuable American rights, cannot be called a bad return, even after allowing for the special nature of the

articles and the famous signature under which they appeared.

Apart from special signed material of this nature, there is now a market in this country for the syndication of the right kind of feature. Here is an immense field, ranging from hens to wireless, and health to fashion notes, which has the additional advantage for the specialist in that it deals with a class of article often underpaid in the past. A man who has been contributing a poultry feature to one newspaper for a weekly fee of £3 can afford to syndicate the same article to twelve papers at ten shillings a week and still be in pocket over the deal.

Journalists are often heard saying that there is no chance for anyone who isn't at least an ex-Premier to secure syndication of their work in this country. I will anticipate this criticism of what I have said above by quoting the words of the manager of one of the largest agencies handling this class of business in London.

Asked to state his opinion on the prospects of syndication in Britain, he said: "Syndication here is not moribund, as many people think—it is growing and growing fast. Whereas two years ago I syndicated one feature a week, I now syndicate five. And they all sell better than my one did in 1921. There is a large future for the specialist journalist who will study the requirements of this syndication market. It isn't easy, of course, for, because a man can interest the readers of a London newspaper it doesn't say he can interest Lancashire or Dundee. But the opportunities are there, and I have not the slightest doubt that within the next year or two journalists will arise to take advantage of them on a big scale."



Syndication is a magic word in the vocabulary of every free-lance, but practical knowledge of its operation is at present confined to a small percentage of professional writers. Simultaneous publication in different areas of the same territory is obviously limited to material of widespread interest. In the wide territory of the U.S.A. syndication operates on a large scale, and serials and articles of every kind are commonly circulated throughout the country, often appearing in as many as a hundred papers simultaneously.

Territorially, Great Britain offers relatively little scope for syndication, but, although it is still in its infancy as compared with America, the field is perceptibly widening. In certain limited directions syndication has been in existence here for some years. One Fleet Street firm, for instance, has long purchased serial stories for syndication in the provinces, and several London papers have had arrangements by which important articles and other features are published simultaneously in one, or perhaps several, newspapers in the North and Scotland.

The next step in British syndication came with the "grouping" of many provincial daily and evening papers under London management, and the syndication in those groups of selected features prepared in London. Most of these features are prepared by journalists on the headquarters staff of the companies concerned, but recently the system has been extended in certain quarters to leader-page articles accepted from outside contributors. Thus an article purchased by a Manchester daily may appear simultaneously in Newcastle and Sheffield. In these cases it is usual for a contribution so used to be

paid for at a rather higher rate than if it appeared in one paper only.

Probably the time is approaching when any really important article sold to one paper in a provincial group, such as an interview with a prominent statesman, a distinguished dramatist or a protagonist in a recent *cause célèbre* (for such is the diversity of big "stories") will automatically appear in all the various regional dailies owned by the group to which it is sold. Usually the price paid for contributions of this nature is a liberal one, but as syndication becomes more general, free-lances will be well advised when offering such an article to stipulate two prices—one for a single insertion and one—about double—to be paid if the article appears in three or more papers. Generally speaking, the value of individual provincial rights is about one-tenth of the London newspaper market value. It follows therefore that an article sold on a syndication basis should, if simultaneously published in two provincial papers, be worth double the price.

When the free-lance sells an article or "story" to a paper circulating in one area only, such as London or Manchester, and wishes to sell other local rights—e.g. in Scotland, South Wales, N.E. Coast, Midlands, etc., he must either himself approach dailies serving these areas and arrange simultaneous "release," or place the disposal of his article in the hands of an agency. The latter procedure will probably prove more satisfactory, unless the free-lance is a shrewd and experienced judge of values. Most literary agents are now accustomed to handling regional "rights" in Britain, while one or two London agents are now specialising in syndication.

The latter have reached the stage when they are occasionally prepared definitely to accept articles and series for the express purpose of syndication on American lines (and usually on the same terms of fifty per cent to the writer and fifty per cent. to the agency).

To quote an example Shortly after the V.C.'s dinner in London, in November, 1929, an agency approached a holder of the coveted medal and discussed sending him to Gallipoli for the purpose of preparing a series of articles on Gallipoli to-day, not for sale to one London daily, but for syndication to several papers in different parts of the country.

A note of warning must be sounded here. The free-lance must remember that the majority of London daily newspapers circulate in all parts of Great Britain, and any contribution sold to them cannot therefore be *subsequently* sold elsewhere unless some provincial paper can be induced to buy "second rights"—a rare occurrence. The journalist who gets a "scoop" must decide, therefore, whether it will pay him better to sell "first British serial rights" to one London daily, or to sell regional rights to perhaps half a dozen papers in the provinces. No hard and fast rule can be laid down for guidance—it depends upon the material in each case. But generally speaking, the prominent London dailies will pay a price for a "big story" which most free-lances would prefer to accept rather than face the difficulties of arranging syndication and the problematical result.

What I have written here about syndication is not of practical importance in the case of ordinary articles by comparatively unknown writers, but applies only to "signed" features which are of first-rate importance

—the kind of “story” which a free-lance, unless he is more than ordinarily lucky, rarely secures.

To sell in the provinces, a contribution must be of such importance that the newspapers concerned cannot secure it in their own territory. An article on the future of wireless by an unknown or relatively unknown contributor cannot, for instance, be syndicated under present conditions ; but an article on the same subject by, say, Senator Marconi, is certainly eligible.

The plain truth is that there is as yet limited scope for the syndication of ordinary material in this country. The syndication of a regular “feature,” *e.g.*, authoritative bridge articles, is always a possibility ; and serials by comparatively unknown authors are sometimes duplicated in different territories, such arrangements usually being a matter of convenience and economy to the papers concerned.

Syndication, it will be seen, is a market to be watched by the average free-lance for future developments, rather than explored for present possibilities, except in the case of material of outstanding importance.

## CHAPTER XI

### ORGANISATION AND ROUTINE

IN the first chapter of this book I remarked that journalism to-day—from the point of view of the free-lance, at all events—is a trade rather than a profession. Like all trades, a certain amount of organisation is necessary if the young man entering it is to make the most of whatever opportunities come his way.

The most important part of this routine side of free-lance journalism is preparing your articles and news stories in such a way that their appearance will assist your chances rather than hinder them. Just as an attractive wrapper may help the sales of soap or a bottle of sauce, so contributions prepared in accordance with certain recognised rules of the writing game will greatly increase the chances of prompt consideration. By this I do not mean to infer that accurate typing or a two-colour ribbon on your machine will cause an editor to purchase an article which he doesn't want. It won't. But it will give the sender an increased prestige which is almost invaluable in a trade where it is so often impossible to check the statements made by contributors and where, therefore, it is often a journalist's reputation

alone which helps the editor to decide whether or not he can rely upon the accuracy of an article.

A prominent Fleet Street editor stated recently that he could nearly always tell whether a new writer was reliable or not by looking at his "copy." If it had been carefully corrected after leaving the typewriter, then the writer was a man who valued accuracy in small things, like a misspelt word. And that sort of man usually knows the value of accuracy in large matters as well. But if the "copy" showed signs of having been "knocked off" in a hurry and then left uncorrected, with commas in the wrong places and letters transposed in words, then it is extremely doubtful whether the writer is to be relied upon for the veracity of his statements.

I do not suggest that this point of view is that of all editors. At least one Fleet Street man takes the directly opposite view that the man who spends his time crossin his "t's" hasn't much left for writing a good story. But generally speaking, time occupied in making sure of the accuracy of all you write, and in presenting it in a neat fashion, is time well spent.

Most people possessing any aspirations of a journalistic nature at all know that all contributions should be typewritten on one side of the paper only. It is not so generally known that articles should be typed with a double space between each line and a wide margin to the page, thus allowing the sub-editors who will handle the story in the event of its acceptance the space to make their corrections without cutting up the copy and repasting it—line by line—which is what happens when only single spacing is used.

Always indicate the length of the contribution and

also the name and address of the sender above the title on the first page, like this :

About 800 words.      From : A. Brown,  
31 Holden Avenue,  
South Wayne.

### SOLVING THE TRAFFIC PROBLEM FAMOUS SCIENTIST'S REVOLUTIONARY PLAN

It is important that the length of the contribution should be correctly stated, although it is not necessary to go beyond round hundreds in your figures. Thus, an article of 923 words should be measured as "about 900 words."

Always keep a carbon copy of every article you submit to an editor. Although newspapers and magazines make every effort to return manuscripts rejected whenever a stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed, it is inevitable that odd articles become mislaid from time to time, and unless you have a copy this means rewriting the contribution all over again. Those who have experienced the necessity of doing this on two or three occasions will agree that the second version of a story is never as satisfactory as the first. Keep a copy of the first, therefore.

Having made two copies of your article, and dispatched the original to an editor, it is necessary to keep track of it. If you are only writing one or two articles a week this is not difficult, but if your output is as large as that of most free-lances, it is imperative that you should have some means of recording where each article goes to,

if only to make sure that in the event of rejection at half a dozen offices you do not end up by submitting it a second time to the editor who first gave it consideration, a happening by no means as uncommon as most people would suppose, but one that never fails to create a bad impression upon a hard-worked editor who finds himself called upon to read an unsuitable contribution a second time owing to the carelessness of a casual contributor.

To obviate this danger, and to enable you to keep an accurate account of every article you write, an article register is necessary. This should be ruled off in such a way as to form a complete history of each contribution. There are various forms of registers suitable for this purpose, of which the most practicable is as follows, manufactured by the simple method of ruling off an ordinary accounts book :

| Title of<br>Article | Date<br>written | Submit-<br>ted to | Date<br>sent | Date<br>retd. | Sold<br>to | Amount |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|--------|
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|--------|

A glance at this register will enable the free-lance to see at any time : (a) the total number of articles written during any month or year ; (b) the number sold ; (c) the amount realised ; (d) the sums outstanding and from whom ; (e) the date any articles regarding which a decision is overdue were dispatched ; (f) just where each article remaining unsold has been submitted.

As for overdue articles, the free-lance should, unless an article is of a topical nature, and the fact explicitly stated in the covering letter which accompanied it, wait in patience for a month before writing to an editor to



inquire as to its fate. If at the end of the month he has had no word, he should send a brief note on these lines :

*On the 9th ultimo I submitted to you a short article, "Solving the Traffic Problem," which seemed likely to prove suitable for your paper. As I have not yet heard your decision on this article, I am wondering whether it may have been overlooked. Perhaps you would be good enough to inquire into the matter for me and let me hear your decision at your convenience.*

If, instead of writing this letter, you decide on a personal call, try and time your visit so that you arrive at the best hour from the editor's point of view. In the case of a daily newspaper, this is usually between eleven and one o'clock in the day. Sunday newspaper staffs do not usually work on Mondays, but Tuesday and Wednesday are in most cases the editor's best days for seeing casual callers. Where weekly periodicals and magazines are concerned, try and find out which is the editor's press day and avoid it. Nothing is so exasperating to an overworked editor as to be worried on some trifling point (and remember that your article probably is a trifling matter from his point of view) in the midst of going to press.

So much for the articles which you send to editors. Turning to the copy which you retain, this should be filed carefully away, together with copies of any correspondence concerning it.

To facilitate speedy reference it is a good plan to subdivide these copies into three sections—daily newspaper

articles, Sunday newspaper articles, and weekly periodicals and magazines. If you make a speciality of interviews with notabilities or signed articles, then a fourth section may be added for them. In this case also keep a special file for the letters and signed notes mentioned in Chapter IV, and which constitute your only authority should any article or interview be questioned after publication.

I have referred to the practical wisdom of having every article clearly typewritten in accordance with certain established customs regarding spacing, margins, etc. The typewriter can assist the free-lance in more ways than one. It can assist him to sell his wares by making them attractive, and it can also help him to increase his output by facilitating abbreviations.

The speed with which a journalist can write, once all the necessary facts are in his possession, depends upon two things, money and organisation. If he is wealthy he can acquire a dictaphone machine, speak 3,000 words an hour on to a wax record and leave his secretary to type the article and have it ready for his signature after a turn round the golf links.

We may assume quite safely, however, that most of the readers of this book are not in a position to maintain expensive machines and staffs to handle their output, but that, like the majority of free-lance journalists already established, they have to prepare their own work from first to last.

It is here the typewriter will come to your aid. Most journalists aim at writing 1,000 words an hour in longhand, and at least 1,500 words an hour when working straight on to the typewriting machine. The clear gain attained

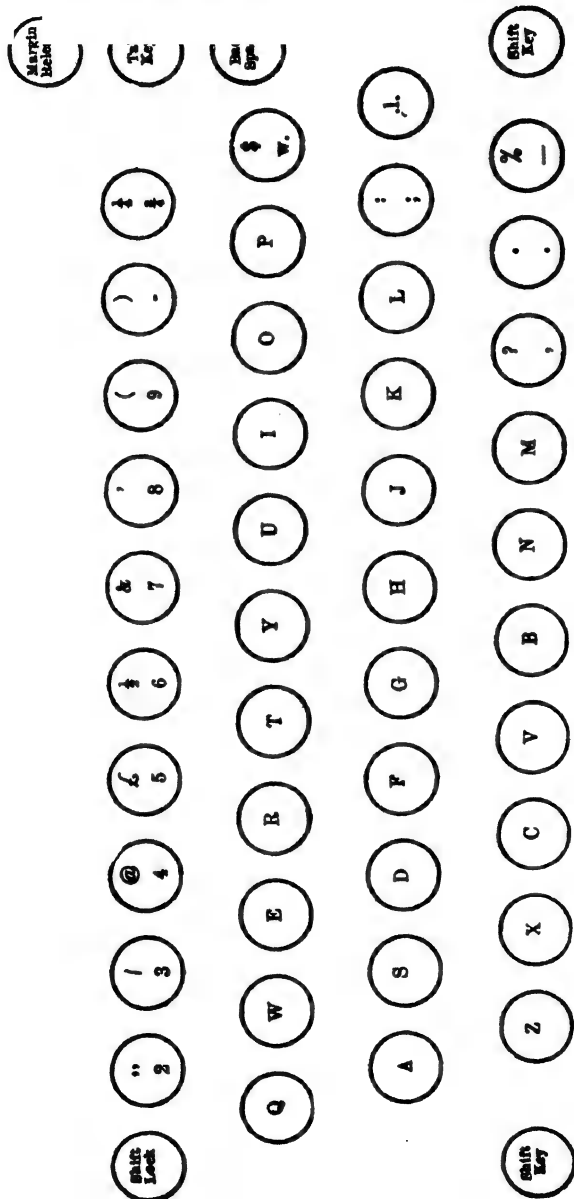
by using a typewriter instead of a fountain pen, therefore, is at least twenty minutes in each hour actually spent in writing. But if the example of many free-lances is followed and a special keyboard incorporating the signs and abbreviations most commonly used by journalists and printers is fitted to your machines, you will find that the actual saving of time is much greater than this. Some of these abbreviations are merely a matter of dropping letters in certain words frequently used, such as "t" for "to," "wh" for "when" or "where," "a" for "and," etc. Others are achieved by special signs, of which the most common is the sign "l," used to denote the word "the."

Any typewriter agent can secure these signs and fix them to any machine for you, together with certain brackets, asterisks, and other devices used in literary work.

As the average free-lance will spend several hours of every day of his life sitting at his typewriter, it will be well worth while to face the small outlay needed to have these alterations made to his typewriter, which should, when ready for work, have a keyboard something like the diagram (*see* p. 366).

The young free-lance should on no account introduce any abbreviation into an article, however, until he has made certain, by regular contributions, that a particular editor does not object to this time-saving method of typewriting. Never force it on anyone, but use it wherever possible for your regular work. I have mentioned the importance of retaining and filing a copy of each article that you write. You should also keep a copy of each article that is published, wherever there is the slightest

## TYPEWRITER KEYBOARD



N.B.—The signs shown include £ and \$ for writing commercial articles, .i. as an abbreviation for "the," the commonest word in journalistic copy, and w. as an abbreviation for "where," "which" and "what." It will also be noticed that the full stop is repeated so that it can be struck when writing both capitals and lower case letters without touching the Shift Lock.

chance that the material contained in it will be useful to you in some form or other on a future occasion. Hundreds of pounds are lost every year by free-lance journalists who have neglected to take this precaution and also, who, five years after they have written on a certain subject, can secure neither a copy of the article nor the facts all over again.

The most convenient way of keeping cuttings of your work is to buy a News Cutting Book. This need not be of the expensive variety, bound in leather. Any sort of cuttings book, strongly put together, will suffice for the purpose. If you are working on two or three definite markets (*i.e.*, articles, fiction, features, interviews, etc.), it will facilitate the work of reference if you keep a separate cuttings book for each type of work. On the cover of each book state the date it was begun and the date finished, and where your articles have appeared on both sides of a page, be sure that only the margin is gummed, so that the complete article is preserved.

There is an additional reason why your output should be carefully preserved in this way. The articles that you succeed in "placing" are your credentials, the only tangible evidence that you have to produce if your efficiency and power are questioned. I am not one of those who subscribe to the view that "once a free-lance always a free-lance." Most of the leading free-lances of Fleet Street to-day have held staff positions, and there can be no doubt that many of them will do so again. They look upon free-lancing as a valuable "second string" upon which they can lean between changes, or when jobs are few and far between. And it is these

men who know better than any others that the first question invariably asked by an editor when interviewing an applicant is : " Have you any specimen articles that I can see ? " The journalist who takes care to have his organisation right has the evidence ready when it is wanted. It is very little use telling an editor that you have sold five hundred articles within twelve months unless you have at least a selection of those articles that you can show to him.

There is a tendency to dismiss this matter by saying : " But I don't want a staff position I'm quite content to be a free-lance," and to those who think like that I would just remark that Fleet Street is the home of changes, the place where fortune's smile and frown follow one another with bewildering rapidity, and in a trade so full of the unexpected as modern journalism undoubtedly is, it is obviously wise to be prepared for all contingencies. It requires very little labour to file your articles away neatly, as they appear. That valuable evidence of your industry may mean all the difference between success and failure when, perhaps some years later, your plans are changed, and you are seeking a position on an editorial staff where every applicant is judged strictly on the ability he has shown in the past.

In the same way you should keep a strict account of what you earn month by month, together with the expenditure that you incur, such as rent, postages, stationery, typing fees, travelling expenses, books, etc. Apart from the satisfaction of knowing what you are earning, you have to remember that the free-lance is, from the tax collector's point of view, a one-man business, and, as

such, may be in danger of being assessed for more than he is earning unless he has a record of his expenses which he can produce when challenged.

A note should also be made of certain concessions allowed to free-lance journalists under the Income Tax Acts. For instance, a free-lance is not entitled to any rebate of tax in respect of the purchase of his first typewriter. But he can claim a rebate in respect of any further typewriter purchased and necessary for the purpose of carrying on his trade as a journalist, and also for any repairs carried out on the first typewriter.

In addition, the Board of Inland Revenue has agreed to allow free-lance journalists to deduct from their incomes when making their returns certain necessary professional expenses, including £20 for reference books and newspapers, £10 for stationery, upkeep of typewriter and fountain pen, half the amount spent on a telephone, and certain travelling expenses.

If only to make sure that he is receiving all the deductions to which he is entitled, therefore, the free-lance should keep a careful account of his income month by month. If to do this means a certain amount of work after the week's writing is finished, he will have the consolation of knowing that his carefully-kept accounts and diaries may furnish him one day with a mass of material for his reminiscences, which would have been quite unprocurable but for the time devoted to organisation. It is a minor branch of the journalist's craft, but one which will adequately repay the writer for the comparatively small amount of time involved.

A good reference library is important. I hesitate

to be dogmatic about books of reference, which obviously depend on the individual writer's activities and the extent of his purse. For many years my own "working library" has contained, *Whitaker's Almanack*, Roget's *Thesaurus*, *The Literary Year Book*, *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book*, *Chambers' Dictionary*, *Jack's Reference Book*, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, and *Who's Who*, all of which have been of great service. The working efficiency of the free-lance often depends, not so much on the extent of his own knowledge, but on his ability to lay his hand on the facts he wants as quickly as possible.

The free-lance will not make much headway in journalism until he realises how wide and varied a field is open to him. Journalism should be approached seriously and systematically, and the free-lance who has his wits about him and can adapt his style to different editorial requirements ought to be able to make journalism pay. I say again that journalism is a trade, but it is none the worse for that. It was Dr. Johnson who said, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money." But the profit that may be derived from journalism is more than pounds, shillings and pence.

The satisfaction of being able to place before a wide public—often to be counted by the million—one's own ideas or point of view in the form of printed matter is one that never loses its savour. And journalism keeps one in that happy state of being continually on the alert. The real free-lance journalist never gets into a groove; his vision is quickened, his mind active in innumerable different directions, his interest absorbed in a multitude



of subjects. The practice of journalism provides him with a liberal education.

There will be difficulties in the way, but enthusiasm and calculating perseverance will dispose of them, if he is made of the right stuff. Every writer, whether he be journalist or playwright, poet or novelist, has to contend with all kinds of discouragement and rebuff. No beginner ever found journalism "easy money." This is what Ernest Raymond, author of *Tell England!* and other novels says of his own experiences :

There is only one message to the literary aspirant, and it is, "Forge on through a sea of rejection slips and you will get there in the morning." It may take three years, it may take six ; and it may take nine, but if you don't arrive with drums in the ninth, you'll arrive with thunder in the tenth.

I opened my bombardment when I was about seventeen years old : and the blasted Hindenburg Line didn't fall till I was thirty-two. The outer system to be carried was a literary agent of high standing ; he succumbed in due course. From this vantage point, we bombarded the publishers for over a year ; and, at last, that tough and sombre system fell. Then the publishers turned their heavy artillery on the public, and the last defences went up in smoke. Thereafter, naught remained but to walk in and possess the promised land. And it's a land worth fighting for ; many of its paths are plenteousness, and all its ways are joy.

Finally, the would-be journalist will, perhaps, derive from the next chapter the most substantial encouragement of all. Thanks to the courtesy of many of the leading free-lance journalists, I am able to print what they themselves feel about journalism as a

result of individual and, in every instance, successful experience.

“ *Il faut cultiver notre jardin,*” said Voltaire. Let that be the honourable justification of every journalist who realises, as he should do, that he is an author in business.

## CHAPTER XII

### "HOW I MAKE JOURNALISM PAY"

*[This chapter contains contributions from twenty-two leading journalists, who very kindly accepted my invitation to put on record the fruits of their own experience for the benefit of the aspiring writer. In this chapter many phases of journalistic activity are represented: editing, news, newspaper and magazine articles, politics, fashion, cookery, publicity, sport, etc. It should, therefore, serve the purpose of indicating how wide the field of journalism is, in addition to providing the beginner with advice of the most practical kind.]*

#### T. C. BRIDGES

*("T. C. B."—One of the most versatile free-lance journalists of to-day.)*

MANY years ago, I think it was in 1896, the late Lord Northcliffe was talking to some of us youngsters employed in his office, and one said: "But it is so hard to find ideas for articles, Mr. Harmsworth."

"Hard?" repeated the Chief, with a touch of scorn. "Why, anyone worth his salt should be able to get ideas for at least two good articles while coming down the Strand on the top of a bus."

No words have ever stuck more firmly in my memory than these, and none have been more valuable to me in my profession. For the meaning of them was this: that the journalist, wherever he goes, should keep his eyes and ears open and never fail to make mental note of anything interesting that may pass before them. An odd advertisement, something new in a shop window,

even the hole in the street, may suggest an article. Some of the most successful articles which I have written have been gained in this way or from conversations with people with whom I have chatted in trains or by the roadside.

It is the common things of everyday life in which the average person takes most interest. The man in the street is far more interested in a flashlight sign than in the planet Mars, in the gulls on the Embankment than in the black swans of Australia. Even the most commonplace objects, industries, or professions have their interesting side, and often a very unusual side. To a woodman the felling of a tree is so ordinary a matter that he cannot see anything specially interesting in it, yet the City clerk who has perhaps never seen a tree felled may find that a description of the different methods employed is well worth reading.

Industrial processes of different kinds offer material for endless articles. For instance, we all wear collars and use tooth-brushes, yet how much or how little do most of us know of the methods of their manufacture?

But what I would urge strongly upon the young free-lance is the necessity for being topical, for looking ahead from week to week and month to month and so being ready with material suitable for the season or the coming event. Editors are always in search of the topical article, and a little forethought in this respect will bring many a guinea into the free-lance's pocket.

The old-fashioned free-lance was ready to write on any and every subject, but times have changed, and while the field is wider competition is more severe. I strongly advise the young free-lance to specialise. Take a subject and master it, for once you are known as a real authority on that subject you will have no more idle hours.

## MARGARET CHUTE

*(The well-known organiser and woman journalist.)*

Success in free-lance journalism depends principally upon ability to make and keep friends, and selection of the best market for the goods one has to sell. Tastes and requirements of editors should be carefully studied, through the pages of the journals they

control. I have always imagined that nothing annoys an editor more than the advancement of an idea that could never in any circumstances suit his particular readers. Whereas a suitable type of idea, even though it has to be rejected at the moment it is put forward, may conceivably lead an editor to ask for, or listen to, other ideas of an equally suitable nature. Which produces work, in the end.

Ability to make friends, and to remember names, is of the utmost importance to a free-lance journalist. Careful notes made of names of private secretaries to famous men and women can secure an interview that would otherwise be difficult if not impossible to obtain. In the case of a symposium this is particularly important, as a secretary can often secure an opinion—if properly approached—which would otherwise be refused.

A large part of free-lance journalism consists of signed feature articles; and here the ability to make friends with stage players, athletes, artists, musicians, and so forth wins half the battle for the keen journalist. For instance, if a magazine or weekly paper wants a signed article on Beauty or Clothes or Stage Training, the wide-awake free-lance is able to suggest without hesitation the best name to link with such an article. Moreover, to put forward the name knowing that Miss Dash or Madame Blank is sufficiently friendly to be approached with every likelihood that the article will be secured. Luckless indeed is the journalist minus friends in many professions; for that journalist's meek "I might be able to get at So-and-So," generally ends in: "I'm so sorry, I couldn't get that article after all." Whereas the confident suggestion of a big name, backed by "I know her quite well, I'm sure she will be pleased to do the article for you," generally leads to delivery of the goods within the time limit given. Careful cultivation of friends is the rock on which success in free-lance journalism is built.

J. P. COLLINS

*(The well-known overseas correspondent.)*

The American who tapped the sly old gardener about the cathedral turf got the answer he deserved. "Oh, just a bushel o' grass seed; and then you rolls it and rolls it and rolls it for a

few 'undred years." It is the perspective factor that tells—the patience that digests reverses, the breadth of interest that turns all things to account. Fluency, phraseology, treatment—these are lesser things. What matters is the versatility that knocks off a leader or a limerick at call. It came somehow through the hard probation of the old provincial office, and Fleet Street cannot replace it.

After you've been "snub-edited" on half a dozen staffs, and taken over tasks that other men refused, it is no trouble to drop off and land on your feet. By this time you have learned how and where to dip your finger in the stewpot of universal knowledge while it's hot, and how to spread out the result in print, with a garnish of pictures or pleasantries to taste. The market is always open. "There will come a Christian by," etc.

Some men haunt the Museum, but it swallows up time. Like Mangan, you potter along too many shelves and browse off into forgetfulness. Besides, institution books are no books at all, as Elia said. I prefer my own at home and the job is to keep them under five figures. After all, it is memory and marginalia that make them fertile. The one or two men I know who follow the same bent are always ready to help on requisition, and this game of barter is never abused. But the best stuff is out in the open.

The rest of the outfit is nothing unusual—asprinkle of languages, a few knapsack or cycle holidays as far as possible, a circle of old friendships (preferably in other callings), any amount of reading and general information, just the ordinary recreations, and the company of youngsters to keep your mind fresh. If (and the "if" is Kipling's) you are not grasping in your demands on life, you'll be sure of a modest independence in both senses. And if (the bigger "If") there's the enviable gleam in you of better things—well, there you are!

### ELIZABETH CRAIG

*(A popular writer on feminine topics.)*

The easiest way to make journalism pay is to specialise, and specialise in subjects that have universal appeal.

At least that is how I do so. I write on many subjects, but specialise in domestic science.

But you cannot specialise unless you yourself first become a specialist.

If you want to write on Gardening, learn all you can about Gardening. If you want to discourse on Crime, haunt the Courts, and study your subject deeply and exhaustively before putting pen to paper. If you wish to write on domestic themes, study them at the best college available, as I did.

You want to be able to write whatever you write with authority, so that when an editor requires an article on your pet subject your name springs instantly to his mind, *because your stuff rings true.*

I specialised in domestic questions because I am deeply interested in the Art of Domesticity, which embraces cookery and household management in general. I felt, when I started to free-lance, that the national cuisine had fallen into disrepute, that British women did not take such close personal interest in their kitchens as women of practically every other land, that our menus were dull, often stolid.

So, trying to glorify the art in my own kitchen, I tried just as eagerly to glorify it in the press, and soon found a large market for articles of this kind in Britain and also in America, where the kitchen is the heart of the house. Topical articles, about five hundred words in length, are most in request.

At the same time, I do not think it wise to write exclusively on one subject. It rests the brain to dodge from one to another. To give an example—for days I may have been dealing with domestic subjects entirely when suddenly the call comes for a lengthy and vigorous attack on some social evil. The next domestic story I write is all the brighter for my dive into a problem of the day.

*Though you specialise in one direction you cannot be too versatile in others.*

JANE DOE

*(Who has probably a bigger "audience" than any other British woman journalist.)*

I am the very last person in Fleet Street who should be held up as a shining example to the budding free-lance. As my editor

most frequently reminds me : " You may be a joy to your readers but you're a pain in the neck to me." Or cutting and true words to this effect. The uncomfortable truth is I have never found the writing of even the shortest and simplest bit of work easy or particularly pleasurable. Most workdays I sit before my scribbling block in much the same frame of mind and humour as other folks in the dead days have gone down on their knees to a very different sort of block, and totally unable to think of a single word, except " workhouse." Then with but two or three hours between me and the very last moment of editorial grace and patience, the sack and the prospect of letting my paper down, the article in some miraculous fashion begins painfully to unwind itself from the spaghetti-like coils which must constitute my imagination, and I am enabled for the umpteenth inglorious occasion to lay same (the article, not the spaghetti) on the editorial desk, just in the nick of time.

Said a pleasant someone, wishing to butter me up : " Your stuff reads just as if it came straight out of the fountain pen."

" Maybe ! " I snapped, " but it doesn't write like it."

Yet strangely enough (and I have never ceased to marvel at it), between you and me and the Inland Revenue Bogie Man, I make journalism pay, and I can look the long years ahead rather calmly in the face, knowing I have ensured my own old age pension from my free-lance efforts of the last few years.

All this, of course, is most offensively personal. But there's a useful moral. I could make pots more money if I were better disciplined and had a sensible system of work. Wireless broadcasting notwithstanding, the prospects of a free-lance were never so rosy and so thrilling. My first free-lance week in Fleet Street, when I was fifteen, netted me six guineas weekly for six weeks. To-day, with all the bright little weeklies on the market, and the hungry cries of editors for happy articles and stories and serials of sympathetic and romantic appeal, I could treble that weekly amount, and keep it going just so long as my perspiration lasted out, *and without leaving my front doorstep.*

• But if I were starting my working life again the first thing I would do would be to get a job as a cub reporter and stick it for at least two years. Any person who hopes to exist on the fruits and flowers of his imagination must first learn thoroughly to discipline it, so that he can sit down and turn out material without



any unnecessary sweat and palaver ; to economise in words ; and to get the picturesque and human grasp of a subject instantanously. As a mind, character and energy brightener, newspaper reporting has got all the schools of journalism beaten to a frazzle.

After that is accomplished the next business in hand is getting on the right side of the Great British Public. And keep your eyebrows well pinned down. It is quite likely you may know it all and in consequence feel enormously sorry for the Great B. P. for not having enjoyed all your advantages. But the Great B. P. is not always impressed. Very frequently it is bored stiff. Silly and presumptuous of it, but there it is. Amuse it. Cheer it up. Chat to it. Bully it a little. Tickle its funny-bone. Giggle with it. Confide in it. Give it, now and again, a good old cry. It loves that. But, don't for your success's sake, come the superior highbrow over it.

Write simply. Some journalists are so extravagant with their ideas and expressions, their phrases are so involved and paragraphs so drawn out, that it is necessary to go over most of their outpourings with the aid of a small tooth-comb. If you must swallow a dictionary, make it a vest-pocket one. Not too much slavish insistence on the thoughts and lives of dead men. Your business is to interest living people. Therefore, you must seek mainly among such for your ideas, your information and your inspiration. I would rather bring a smile into the eyes of a living woman than write brilliantly and learnedly about a dead one.

All the foregoing in a nutshell : The Great British Public is a loyal, considerate and friendly dear. Next in order of merit are editors and editresses and newspaper bosses. That has been my happy experience, anyway.

### LEONARD FLEMMING

*(A South African writer who has made a considerable reputation in London journalism.)*

Although in the full sense of the word I am not a journalist—having been farming in the backveld of South Africa for the last twenty years—I have found in journalism a very profitable sideline.

And if I were asked to put into one sentence how I made it pay, I would say: "By writing, in the first place, about those things of which I knew nothing—like railway engines and the future of mankind." These articles were never accepted!

Then I discovered that in the simple things of life—which have gone to the making of my life—I had a large store of good copy, that the little things in my daily round which impressed the farmer's mind had been overlooked by whatever there was of the journalist in me. Loving—and living next to—Nature ever since I was a boy, I wrote of all the simple beauty and charm and fascination of everything around me. I found stories in trees, and streams, and sunsets, and winds, and dawns—in birds, and flowers, and a piece of hard earth. I wrote of all the "little" things which are really so very big. It came more from the heart than from the head, but all the time I was trying to bring the head a little into action, trying to write what an editor and his readers would like, in a way they would like, and taking for my subjects only those things of which I knew something. And I have always endeavoured to gauge the taste of the people of the particular country to which I send my articles, and to be right on time with my copy when I knew that it was expected.

I suppose that there are "tricks of the trade," but these I do not know. I write as simply as possible on the things that both charm and amuse me, trying to appeal to the "kiddy" heart that is in every one of us "grown-ups."

HON. MRS. C. W. FORESTER

*(A recognised authority on all matters appertaining to dress.)*

In early life I learnt to appreciate the glory of colour and line. The vista of the Wicklow Hills and the changing glories of an old-world much loved garden indelibly imprinted themselves on my memory. In shady corners, gazing on long borders full of a delicious riot of colour, I wove childhood fancies—generally dressing my dainty heroines in that eighteenth century splendour of wondrous fabrics, complete with powder and patches. Early impressions are lasting. I recollect my mother and I standing over a spring bed full of auriculas and her telling me that the

original Worth of Paris culled some of his best poetry in colour from the auriculas, that humble flower that then was only produced in that rich wine shade ever associated with the House of Worth—a shade that survived several bad imitations of Victorian magentas ! (To this day, I adore all the now elastic range of wine or mulberry tones.)

Being enamoured of the history of costume of all times, I sallied forth into the realms of designing and creating—with more or less success—and then began to learn the intricacies of dressmaking and the limits of the fashion market. I soon realised my ignorance of all those essentials that contribute to the success of the great machinery. Also, in the “nineties”—great artists were springing up every day—men and women of education and culture went into business. Creative genius became necessary to successful costumiers or wherever the higher ethics of clothes had to be mastered. The big stores extended—from cheese to colour-scheme—and the one frivolous side of life became one of the most important branches of English as well as foreign commerce and industry.

I became a fashion-writer because I had drifted behind closed doors and knew a modicum of its secrets, and every day gathered fresh knowledge concerning its manifold mysteries.

The women-journalists of the “nineties” were apt to regard fashions as a frivolous folly that any mere mortal could relate at leisure ! The most extraordinary epistles were penned as a natural outcome of this ignorance. However, after many a struggle, La Mode suddenly assumed a new importance in England and inaugurated a new and far-reaching interest in women's dress that, in its train, carried a hitherto undreamt-of reporting by high-class journalists. The rich houses started advertising in all the big daily and weekly publications, and the specialists came into their own.

The dress designer and his or her directors began to seek the advice of fully competent and well-versed agents, or secured the services of a publicity manager. This individual supervised the exploitation of his or her creations and studiously studied the launching forth of all that made for the welfare of the feminine sex and thereby introducing the changing modes to an eager and enthusiastic public.

I write on many subjects—but specialise in Fashion.\* There

are many reasons: An editor—first and foremost—requires an article on any subject to ring true. A manufacturer wants his materials properly placed on the markets. Fashion creators expect their efforts to be exploited to advantage. A large proportion of the public demand the clear and concise presentation of sartorial facts. Above all—Fashion is topical, and topical journalism opens an ever widening field of activity.

### GILBERT FRANKAU

*(The celebrated novelist who is a regular contributor to the leading newspapers and magazines.)*

There is only one way to make free-lance journalism pay; and that is under no circumstances to become a free-lance journalist. This may sound rather dispiriting to the average novice, and yet, in my own case, I have found it utterly true.

After all, you have to consider the editor's viewpoint. In nine cases out of ten, he, the editor, can get the very best article written on any subject under the sun either by his own staff or by those journalists who are, more or less, steadily in his employment. It is only, therefore, when he requires a stunt article, an article which will, he thinks, bring him new readers, that he is prepared to pay a really big price.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it behoves everyone who wants to make *big* money in free-lance journalism, first to qualify himself in some other line of literary, artistic, or political business.

Lord Birkenhead, I believe, gets as much as five hundred guineas for the first British Serial Rights in two thousand words describing some brother statesman. Lady Diana Cooper is reported to have received nearly as much as this for a very short report on a certain royal wedding. Mr. H. G. Wells receives the most fantastic remuneration for the most fantastic essays on what he fondly imagines to be Political Economy. While even a fairly well-known novelist like myself has been known to be paid from a shilling a word upwards for short feature articles on subjects of some public interest.

My advice, then, to the free-lance journalist—as apart from

the staff journalist—is to make a reputation in some other field of notoriety *before* he starts his free-lancing. Let him, for instance, produce an unsuccessful play or paint a picture whose meaning no critic can decipher. Or—if he cannot aspire to these heights—introduce some new fashion such as wearing his hat while supping at one of the most exclusive restaurants.

For, the notoriety once obtained, there will be no need for our aspirant to *submit* articles. Editors will come to him ; and, properly handled, pay him his own price for what they need.

If, on the other hand, the aspiring free-lance has no talent for achieving notoriety and wishes merely to earn his living by the rather pleasant practice of writing, then let him remember that success in free-lance journalism is very like success in any other profession—a long, slow, wearisome job, with more kicks than halfpence when one's down, and just as many kicks—though possibly a few more halfpence—when one's up.

### BRODIE FRASER

*(Late News Editor of the Sunday Times.)*

My personal experience as a free-lance was neither extensive nor peculiar. It was in a sense experimental. I knew the rules and I could avoid the pitfalls.

It may, I think, be taken as an axiom that the free-lance is all the better equipped if he knows the inside routine of a newspaper office. If he has been a sub-editor or a reporter he will have learned the craft and know as a free-lance what to send and where to send it. But if he has not had the practical inside training the best thing he can do is to rope himself to such a guide as Mr. Michael Joseph.

In free-lancing, much, of course, depends upon the news sense of the journalist, and perhaps that is only born with the man. Personally, I think it wise in the free-lance to become associated with an institution like the National Union of Journalists. The editor or news-editor will not then be imposed upon by the fake story.

My own view, too, is, from experience gained as an editor and news editor, that the most popular form of a story is the interview.

Few news editors will reject an interview with a celebrity on a question keenly discussed at the moment.

The free-lance, too, would be wise to study the lists of forthcoming events and take, in a sense, time by the forelock. I will give but one example of what I mean. Let us say that a very eminent scientist is announced to lecture on some discovery that has shaken the world. A character-study of the scientist on the day before the lecture would be welcome copy to many a harassed news editor.

London is a vast storehouse of good stories. Let the free-lance keep his eyes and his ears open. He must steadily keep before him as his ideal what is popularly known as the "scoop." One good "scoop" makes a reputation.

The path of the free-lance is hard to tread, but the life has such compensations as are known in no other profession. If it be that "Work is worship" then the journalist is the most religious of men! For it is perseverance and hard labour that will carry him further than all the forces of genius. One last word: he must always verify his facts, and avoid at all costs letting his editor down.

#### CLIVE HOLLAND

*(Novelist, editor and a well known contributor to newspapers and magazines.)*

The humdrum days of journalism are past. Each year, nay, almost may one say every month, the struggle becomes keener; the life more strenuous. Even on provincial papers the jog-trot of a few years ago has been replaced by the "rush tactics" of to-day. The public demands its news served up hot; and even special articles which a few years ago might deal with almost anything about which a man could write, and be remote in subject, time and ideas—provided the article were well written—must to-day be "topical." They must in most newspapers, deal with a "live" topic; a news item of the day or of to-morrow; and in them brevity is the soul which makes for acceptance.

The ponderous column leader has almost ceased to appear, and is becoming, indeed, a thing of the past. The column length

special article has been shrinking during the last few years, until to-day a quarter column is the ideal length. Although it must be admitted that this is on the "scrappy" side.

The successful free-lance journalist must possess several admirable and quite a number of good qualities. He must have courage, for the way to success is often long and arduous; pertinacity, for editors are fallible, and may reject to-day what they will welcome to-morrow; good health, for the strain put upon his or her physique is bound to be heavy if journalism is undertaken for a living, and not as a mere pastime; and faith in his or her ability to win through.

To be well educated in a wider sense than that of the schools is one of the most desirable qualifications for a free-lance; to have travelled is an immense asset, as travel tends to widen the sympathies and broaden the mind, and the most successful journalists are usually men of wide sympathies; and to have an alert intellect, able to decide quickly upon essentials, values, and the form in which the information should be presented is almost a *sine qua non* to ensure real success.

Industry, imagination, judicial impartiality in weighing evidence, intuition—all these things strangely enough begin with the first personal pronoun—will carry one far. Few journalists, save the greatest, possess all, or even most of the qualities I have indicated. Best of all to aid one to win through is the possession of that quality which the French call *flair*.

Competition is so keen nowadays, sometimes indeed one smiles ruefully to see from what odd quarters it comes—the Church, the Stage, Society, notable criminals, the relatives of distinguished people, are all to-day bitten, seemingly, with the itch to write—that journalism, and free-lance journalism especially, has become one of the most exacting and competitive of callings.

How lamentably barren some of the efforts of the amateurs I have indicated are, and even those of pupils of some "Schools of Journalism," is illustrated by a fact that the editor of a well-known and great Northern newspaper recently told me. He said: "Hoping to discover talent, I advertised in *The Times* for articles. Over eight hundred were sent in, many by persons at all events claiming to be pupils of various schools of journalism. Not a dozen proved 'possibles' and only three or four were first-rate."

But there is yet room at the top, to which so few ever climb;

a freshness of subject and viewpoint, "punch," a distinction of style will carry one far.

To keep one's eyes open, also one's ears, to be not only on time, but sometimes even ahead of time, may be said to constitute the rudiments to be remembered by the would-be successful free-lance.

### J. P. HOLLAND

(*A leading authority on motoring matters.*)

The title of this chapter is not mine. On the assumption that I am making or have made journalism pay, Mr. Michael Joseph asked me to contribute a few hundred words to this symposium in the expectation that from my forty odd years' experience in journalism I might scrape a few crumbs of wisdom beneficial to the younger generation. Of course I could fill pages with ponderous platitudes and copybook texts, but everybody who knows me would cry "Fake!" And they would be quite right. However, I do recall a solitary instance where I made journalism pay, and here it is.

Over twenty years ago, when I was on the staff of the *Daily Mail*, I was sent on an assignment to a distant county to "cover" an alleged murder case. I had then only recently returned from the United States and my ideas of daily journalism were decidedly yellow-American. If facts were scarce, then fill in with frills, only make it a good story. All restrictions about being *sub judice*, or likely to lead to contempt of court, were Greek to me. The result was that when my "story" appeared in print, it was immediately followed by a letter from the defending lawyer with the interesting information that as the matter was still *sub judice*, he proposed at the next session of court to apply for a committal for contempt against Mr. Alfred Harmsworth and myself.

On being shown this communication, whose serious import I did not even then understand, I did as any American reporter would do under the circumstances. I wired to the lawyer—whose acquaintance I had made on my previous visit—urging him to do nothing until I saw him. Without going into details, suffice it to say I saw him next day and the result was no application for contempt of court.



A few days later I met the Chief on the lift, and he beckoned me to follow him into his private office. I had already been given a hint that I was in for a good wiggling when he saw me and was not surprised therefore when he immediately turned on me as the office door closed and demanded to know what the deuce I meant by pledging his name and credit to pay a lawyer's bill. I was consequently prepared with my answer, and was proceeding to name the steps I had taken to secure authority for my action, when he interrupted me.

"Oh, you journalists," he said with stinging contempt, "you may be good writers and all that, but as business men you are a lot of fools."

His commendation of my ability as a writer gave me the hint.

"Quite right, sir," I replied. "If we were business men I would not be working for this paper at my present salary."

"Eh, what?" he asked abruptly. "What salary are you getting?"

I told him.

"And what do you think you ought to get?"

I named a figure just double that amount of my Friday envelope.

The Chief paused for a second. "Perhaps you are right. Your present salary is too little. Still, I don't think it should be doubled at once. Suppose we split the difference?"

I expressed my thanks as best I knew how, and was proceeding to leave the office, when he called me back.

"Look here, Holland," he said. "I called you in here to dismiss you, and you go out with a fifty per cent. increase of salary instead. Perhaps I was wrong in saying all journalists are damned tools and not business men."

And that was the solitary instance in my experience where "I made Journalism Pay."

"K. K." (KENNETH KINNINMONT)

*(Whose literary articles and reviews have appeared regularly in leading papers for many years.)*

In the matter of making journalism pay, it is necessary to remind the would-be journalist that "the salary in any business

under heaven is not the only, not indeed the first question." The would-be journalist who hesitates between journalism and, say, stockbroking, speculating which will the sooner provide him with a Rolls-Royce, or even a two-seater, had better choose stockbroking. For, though journalists can be made, they are best made out of those who have a definite urge towards journalism, for its own sake more than for its monetary rewards. The latter sort survive better the first hundred rejection slips.

After receiving many of those slips, and sending out more : after reading many manuscripts, and marvelling at the way so many writers are oblivious to the first elements of good journalism, conciseness and clearness ; one is more than ever convinced that there is no Easy Street debouching into the middle of Fleet Street. Journalism, like any other job, must be learned ; and the good journalist is learning all his life. Most of us have acquired our learning hardly, by the method of " trial and error." They are luckier, to-day, who have a handbook like this to the Street of Ink.

Perhaps those who do best there are those who, in a job calculated to make anyone *blasé*, can preserve a sense of wonder and amazement. It is the easiest thing in the world to say, " There's nothing new in that " ; and a bitter thing to find that someone else has made a bright half column—and a couple of guineas—out of that nothing new.

More and more the public asks to be amused and interested rather than informed. And to be interesting, on any subject, it is necessary to be interested, if only for the moment. Nothing is new for long ; but there is always a new way of saying it.

P. G. KONODY

(*Art critic of the " Observer," etc.*)

There was a time when art criticism was considered the final refuge for failures in literature and art. Anybody can look at pictures and spin words about them. Or rather I should say, look *through* pictures, and not *at* them. To-day efficient art criticism requires more sustained energy and concentrated study than any other branch of journalism. Every day new fields of research

are being exploited, and the critic, to be worth his salt, must be as familiar with the art of ancient Peru and China and of the Central African negroes, as with that of the Italian Renaissance and with recent European developments. Mere description of pictures does not answer the requirements of the modern reader. Every work of art must be analysed for its abstract organisation, which is altogether independent from its subject content. Above all, the critic must have a sound conception of the basic nature of art and of the essential qualities that foster æsthetic enjoyment.

But no amount of study will make up for lack of intuition. The critic is born, not made. Without that intuitive knowledge of what is good or bad in art, it is sheer waste of time to embark on study with a view to qualifying as a critic. With this initial qualification it is quite easy to become a success as an art critic. All one has to do is to devote ten hours a day to work and six hours to study. But is it worth while? Of all branches of journalism, art criticism is the least wanted and the worst paid. The whole life of the critic is a compromise between his æsthetic ideals and the public craving for sensations and personal gossip for which most, but fortunately not all, editors think it their duty to cater. And amongst artists the critic is a very pariah. He is naturally hated by those whose work he condemns; he is hated worse by those upon whom he lavishes praise, for the artist as a rule hates being patronised, and he is hated worst by those whom he passes over in silence, for this is the offence that artists resent most bitterly. Verily, the art critic's is a sad lot, but it has its compensations in the power to aid budding talent on the road to success, even though, once success is achieved, such services are apt to be quickly forgotten.

#### DAVID MASTERS

*(Author of "The Romance of Excavation," etc., and a well-known free-lance.)*

To succeed as a free-lance journalist, you need money, imagination, brains, wide knowledge, and an ability to write. If you have all these things I would urge you to go into business and make a huge fortune. If, however, you prefer Fleet Street

and an early grave you have my blessing and what little advice I can give.

**EDITORS.**—An editor is a kindly man, filling his paper with articles and stories which experience and the circulation figures prove will appeal to his readers. At best his work is difficult—make it easier for him and he will bless you. Always he is puzzling his brain to find something new, and as Solomon said that "under the sun there is nothing new," an editor may welcome something old presented in a new way.

**REGRETS.**—If your first efforts come back with the Editor's regrets it is because they are unsuitable and not because the editor does not like you. Unless you are very lucky and very brilliant you would need money—a rich father or wealthy wife—to tide you over these difficult days as well as courage to keep on tapping the keys of the typewriter in the face of disappointments.

**MARKETS.**—This question of markets is most important to the free-lance, and to succeed you must survey and know the whole field. Always keep your eye on the markets and note the changes that are going on. What one editor rejects another may accept, but you must not think this reflects on the judgment of the first editor. It merely indicates how you have misjudged your markets.

**SPECIALISE.**—If you have special abilities you may find it pays to specialise on a certain subject. Select the papers you wish to write for, study their contents, and then sit down and write something which you think will suit them. Choose papers publishing matter of a similar type so that you will have a large market in which to place your contributions. Your work then has many chances, whereas if you write something designed to suit one paper alone, and it comes back, you find you have foolishly robbed yourself of a second chance.

**WASTE A STAMP AND SAVE TIME.**—Instead of writing something straightaway, you may prefer to send your idea along to the editor and ask him if he would like an article on the subject. It is cheaper to waste a stamp than to waste your time on unproductive work. If the editor is attracted by the idea, he may ask to see the article, but you must not expect definite commissions until your work is known.

**WHAT TO WRITE.**—Find out what you can write best, then find your market and go on writing it. If you can turn out a

serial story with an exciting ending to each instalment that keeps the reader in suspense, you will soon find as much work as you can do. The boys' papers are always clamouring for good school stories, detective stories, adventure stories; the children's papers offer a big market for children's stories. If you can write on domestic affairs, there are the women's papers seeking suitable material; if you lean to gardening, wireless or sport, you will find a wide range of papers open to you. If you can write a readable short story there are all the monthly magazines to fill.

WHERE TO FIND IDEAS.—The daily newspapers are full of ideas to the trained eye and mind. Jot down every idea as it occurs to you. What is unwanted to-day may be wanted to-morrow.

### WARD MUIR

*(The late Mr. Ward Muir was a regular contributor to many newspapers and magazines.)*

The short article commonly printed in our popular newspapers is either by way of conveying information or else is an entertainment. (Under the latter heading I class the articles which express more or less violent personal opinions and prejudices hung on some topical peg, and also the chit-chat articles which offer advice.)

Since I have been asked to give the fruits of my own experience I may say frankly that the informative article is one from which it does not seem to me possible to earn more than a hack living as a free-lance. Long ago I discovered that it seldom pays to accept an ordinary commission to write a "fact" article; and by this I mean an article necessitating visits to libraries to consult books or the interviewing of experts to obtain instruction on some subject concerning which one was previously ignorant.

I hold that the only way to earn a tolerable free-lance living from journalism is to specialise in the kind of article which can be written without previous research, invented at your own desk, and sold on its merits as an entertainment—whether it incidentally contains any information or any topical comments, or whether it pretends to neither.

The knack of writing such articles is closely akin to that of

writing short stories. Learn to write short stories and you can then write short articles of the light kind.

After a year or two of experimenting in any and every branch of authorship (which is the natural start of all aspirants), the beginner who finds that he is still "compiling" articles—*i.e.*, digging out statistics and purveying the gleanings of research—had better make up his mind to seek a berth as a sub-editor or reporter and not rely on speculative free-lancing. The light-essayist free-lance ought never to need to go a yard out of his daily path to earn a guinea. His art is virtually the art of fiction even when he writes neither novels nor short stories; and his own eyes and brain, his own adventures in life, give him all the information he requires to earn a living as an entertainer.

Two final words :

Avoid anonymous journalism. Your name should become your chief asset. Try to enter as many different periodicals as is reasonably practicable. When you are writing for a score of different papers, if only irregularly, you cannot lose your livelihood at a blow, as sometimes happens to the man who has a connection with one firm only. Following this principle, the versatile free-lance is far more secure, though he appears to live from hand to mouth, than many a writer on the salary list.

## CRAWFURD PRICE

*(The well known authority on European affairs.)*

That branch of journalism which concerns itself with foreign affairs is, perhaps, the most difficult of all to enter, for it demands the exercise of special faculties and, in the majority of cases, a certain financial backing. To those who desire to specialise therein, however, the normal course of preparation may be clearly indicated. Having acquired a working knowledge of diplomatic history and a couple of foreign languages at home, first-hand acquaintance with some foreign country, preferably one likely to figure prominently in international affairs, should be obtained by actual residence abroad. In exceptional instances a benevolent newspaper may be found willing to bear the expense involved; failing this, the young journalist must regard it as a premium

paid for entry into his profession. But if the time be fruitfully employed, editors—always on the watch for men who know their subject—will soon welcome contributions, and an appointment as regular correspondent should not be long delayed.

While keeping the local pot boiling, our aspirant for journalistic honours may now wander farther afield. To know one country thoroughly is half way to knowledge of another, and the range of action can be speedily and effectively increased. The necessary habit of taking the international view of things will develop almost unconsciously, but to this must be added an understanding of the psychology of other peoples.

In my own case, I had the good fortune to be travelling in Turkey when revolution broke out, and a London newspaper was in need of a correspondent. That introduction resulted in a permanent engagement, and I was able, by travel, intercourse and study, to become intimately acquainted first with the nations and politics of the Near East and the Balkans, and, subsequently, with those of Central Europe. This accomplished, I sought and obtained experience in the greater Continental countries. Three wars, two revolutions, and—perhaps worst of all—half a dozen Peace Conferences! A hard school, if you will, but nevertheless the best school of all.

### LANGFORD REED

*(The well-known journalist and author. His special province is films.)*

The most practical method I know of how to make free-lance journalism pay is to deliberately write what is known in Fleet Street as "tosh." I say this not as a cynic but as a philosopher, for cynicism is essentially the proclivity of the very young or the very wealthy, and the average adventurer in the lists of "literature" who writes for his living will soon learn to take things as they are and to profit by them to the best of his ability.

By "tosh" I mean the kind of innocuous twaddle which a very large number of perfectly respectable newspapers and periodicals require for the immense lower-middle class public upon which they depend for their existence.

The aspiring young writer who would make a living by his pen in these days must be practical enough to write not what he wants to, but what the editors want him to write, and to find some compensation—if he can—in the fact that authorship of this kind is thoroughly respectable, for I do not believe that any of the editors who encourage it would accept a contribution in bad taste.

If one is a genius, it is, of course, possible to achieve posthumous fame without recognising the obligation (to one's friends, as well as to one's self-respect) of first making a living; as several Heaven-inspired writers have proved, but had they been more practical they might have tasted of the sweets of success during their lifetime and have been spared the misery and the degradation of having to sponge upon one's friends which makes financial failure more bitter to bear than utter artistic failure to anyone who is in the least sensitive. Francis Thompson, the most glorious poet of recent times, in my opinion, might be alive and prosperous to-day if he could have brought himself to turn out sellable "tosh" under another name, while continuing to write immortal verse under his own.

And I venture to assert that, without the aid of private means to provide the common necessities of life during their early struggles, nearly all our living writers have only achieved fame by first catering for the public taste and so reaching "independence" through "dependence," though I dare swear very few of them would admit it.

Perhaps my own experience is worth referring to. I most sincerely believe that I should never have been able to achieve the moderate artistic success of a couple of books, a few hundred short stories and articles, a number of light-verse "poems," and half a dozen stage and screen plays had I not deliberately devoted three or four days a week to the less enjoyable but more remunerative work of grinding out "tosh."

Briefly, then, my advice to the young author who must write to live before he can live to write is that until he has solved the problem of making enough to cover the common necessities of life he should, while declining to travel third-class on his journey towards the distant station of success, prefer second-class to first, reserving the latter for "special" and "holiday" occasions, as it were. If he determines to travel first-class only, there is



certain to be a breakdown, but by travelling second-class (anonymously if he likes) for nine months in the year and first-class for three he has a reasonable chance of reaching his desired destination.

### EDITH SHACKLETON

*(Edith Shackleton's articles appear regularly in the "Evening Standard.")*

I am asked how I make journalism pay, but I am not sure that, in the commonest sense of the term, I do.

Anybody who thinks of making journalism pay in that sense had better pause and then start a fish and chip business instead. But journalism pays by giving the journalist a working life which, instead of being a bondage to tasks which he personally dislikes, is a sort of extension and intensification of his private interests. Indeed, the bored journalist must be a failure, while it is conceivable that a bored doctor or lawyer, given a sense of duty, might be efficient.

During many years on the staff of a great newspaper house I have seen a great deal of free-lance work and its editorial treatment. The resulting impression is that the chief fault of the would-be journalist is contempt—for editors as well as for the reading public. It is not true that manuscripts are not faithfully read, or that sound work requires any recommendation beyond its own quality, but editors are properly affronted by untidy manuscripts, perfunctorily offered.

It must be realised by the young journalist that the general public is no longer as hungry-eyed and ill-informed as it was when *Answers* was brilliantly invented. Those who doubt this should study the textbooks and curriculum of the final classes in the elementary schools. It is easier to sell articles to-day than ever it was, because the fashion for three short pieces instead of one meaty column has lowered the standard, but the free-lance whose success is to continue must be ready for its probable recovery. Only a limited career may be before those who are now light-heartedly pocketing guineas by rapid imitations of the most insincere newspaper articles. Every young writer must

"play the sedulous ape," but even if he is only announcing the Covent Garden prices or describing the holiday scenes at Charing Cross, he should still play it to some of the worth-while writers, from Bunyan to Robert Blatchford, who tell things in simple English, instead of to some stringer of *clichés* who is enjoying an ephemeral success.

### HANNAN SWAFFER

*(One of the greatest journalists of our time. As editor, and theatrical critic, he has impressed his personality on contemporary journalism.)*

There is only one way to make journalism pay. That is, to live it. But, even then, you will never make it pay, really. Journalism will never make you rich, unless you have a sense of money. Then you will merely learn how to make other journalists work for you.

But anyone can make journalism enjoyable, if he likes it to start with. If he doesn't, he should go and dig fields; for monkeys could be trained to do most work that journalists do as well as most of them do it.

During the last quarter of a century I have given up every hour of my waking life to journalism; in consequence, I have enjoyed every hour of my life. On the *Daily Mirror* I used to work practically fourteen hours a day for seven days a week. Lord Northcliffe made all the money; but I loved making it for him. Even when I was running the *Weekly Dispatch*, Lord Northcliffe's Sunday newspaper, I started planning the next issue of the paper the moment the last edition of the current issue had gone to press. And I thought about it all the week.

The consequence is that, whatever happens to me now, I find that, unconsciously, I am making it into an item of news or a suggestion for an article. My only trouble is that there are not enough newspapers in London to contain half the ideas I get, or, rather, there are no newspapers brave enough to print some of them.

I have made several newspapers pay when they seemed hopeless. And when I have made one successful I have sacked myself and joined another one. I hate success. It is the work that matters.

Yet, for years, I have spent practically all my income on enjoying myself. I go to Ascot, to the theatre, to the Opera, to every big prize-fight. I always lunch and dine expensively, and I travel about, usually, in motor-cars. And I find news everywhere. Regardless of the expense, I "do" myself well, and the result is that I am known in all the places that matter, and my face and my name are familiar to nearly everybody in London who is worth knowing, even if they don't know me personally.

If you are a journalist, you should always live beyond your means. You should also sacrifice everything you have for your job, regardless of the recompense, and regardless of whether you will die rich or poor. Let somebody else make the money; you have all the fun.

So that, now, having done this for half my life, I know all about every big horse that is running, and I usually know his owner and his jockey. I know every famous prize-fighter in the world, nearly every artist in London, nearly every singer, nearly every waiter, nearly every author, every actor, actress, comedian and wrestler. And nearly all of them knew me.

And if anyone is divorced, or in a dope scandal, or he dies suddenly, I know all about him, where he lives, whom he lives with, and where to get his photograph.

Most journalists I know go home at six o'clock. So do I. But it is six o'clock in the morning.

I shall die young and I shall die poor. But I shall have had a hell of a time!

## BASIL TOZER

*(Author and publicist of many years' experience.)*

You don't need Great Brains for journalism. What you do need, in addition to a facility for expressing yourself on paper quickly—quickness is an essential—clearly and concisely, is a facility for making friends and acquaintances.

Many years ago I evolved an aphorism: "To 'make good,' make friends," and to this day I have never had cause to regret adhering to that maxim. It can be applied with advantage to professions other than journalism.

A., B. and C. may be extremely clever and capable men ; D. a good deal less clever. But if A., B. and C. don't get about and meet people, make acquaintances, make friends, and D. does, D. is the man who is going to get the jobs and make headway almost every time.

If you wanted to find somebody to do some special work for you, wouldn't you begin by passing in mental review all your friends and acquaintances in the hope of discovering among them the right man ? And so it is with everybody. Therefore, I repeat with emphasis : make friends and acquaintances, the more the better, for even the most unlikely people may be of use to you some day, indirectly ; and every friend you make, keep in touch with. There is an old Italian proverb which is worth remembering :

*Hai cinquata Amici ? Non basta. Hai un Nemico ? E troppo.* (Have you fifty friends ? It is not enough. Have you one enemy ? It is too much.) It applies in this case.

And as others may help you, never fail to help others when opportunity offers. I have never met any set of men and women who, considered collectively, were so ready to help one another as journalists and literary people generally are.

### SYDNEY WALTON

*(Director of the "Yorkshire Evening News," author and free-lance.)*

Two recipes I would give to the beginner. And the first is golden : Study the papers. Read them as you would read an examination paper to ascertain the mind of the examiner. You will after a time be able to sense the type of article acceptable to certain newspapers and unacceptable to others. You will come to know to what landscapes of interest the editor's watch-tower is turned. A newspaper is not a warehouse. There's a personality behind it ; a hunger for particular themes and a desire to see the right exposition of them. To the trained journalist, a newspaper reveals at a glance what manner of merchandise of the mind finds welcome at its quays. First, then, understand the media ; feel the pulse which beats behind the printing-presses You

will increase in intimacy of knowledge concerning this journal's way of looking at things and how it differs from that. Study every kind of newspaper you can get hold of. I give the recipe from life.

And the second recipe is also golden, minted from life. I give it in these words : Look not to the ends of the earth for "copy." The best treasure lies at your threshold. A college chum of mine, now a successful free-lance, used to send articles to the press and receive in return the usual "regrets." I found he was really sending little essays. "Put your own village under kindly, intense observation," I said, "and you will see how interesting it is. Then write from first-hand sight and study." The "regrets" changed into cheques. I began journalism at college, continued it when I became a schoolmaster and found the school itself to be a miniature world, throbbing with "copy." An article of mine which appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* described a school examination. Observe life where you are. Its mystery and wonder touch every blade of grass. The world comes to your window if you have eyes to welcome it.

One final word. Do not think journalism is a primrose path. It isn't. But the primroses will come when the conditions of their growth are right.

### TREVOR C. WIGNALL

*(The well-known novelist and sporting journalist.)*

The most successful free-lance journalist I ever knew, was a man who had spent years of his life collecting newspaper cuttings. He had a library of clippings which made it easy for him to write authoritative articles on practically every subject under the sun.

But that was in the long ago. I doubt whether he would make much of a living now, for it is the specialist, and not the writer on a variety of topics, who most quickly catches the interest of an editor these days.

It should not be forgotten by the beginner in journalism that in the offices of the majority of the weekly periodicals—and, indeed, in the chief newspaper offices—there is invariably one member of the staff who can be relied on to turn out an

entertaining half-column or column on any matter that may be engaging public attention. The demand, at the moment, is for the considered views of the man or the woman who has taken a subject and made it his or her own.

Yet it cannot be said with truth that specialising is devoid of drawbacks. Let my own case serve as an illustration. I was for years a general reporter on newspapers in London and in the provinces. No one knew me, except the few in my immediate circle. I must have written millions of words about sport, and disasters, and great occasions, but they didn't get me anywhere. Then when I had turned my back on staff journalism—and was incidentally collecting a roomful of rejected manuscripts—I was asked to attend a boxing match. From that day to this—enter my own particular drawback! I have not been allowed to write anything which hasn't a fighter or fight in it. I doubt whether there is an editor in the world who would pay me to expound on politics. Boxing, yes; but anything else, definitely no. The specialist, therefore, must be prepared to make his home in the groove which is manufactured for him. It can, however, be a very lucrative groove. There is a bigger market to-day for good and informative contributions than ever before. But what the beginner needs, even more than a ready pen, is a stout heart. The easily dispirited ought never to embrace journalism. When I was a reporter I wrote stories as a sideline. They sold so readily—when it did not really matter whether they were purchased or not—that I eventually decided to forsake newspaper work for fiction. For exactly twelve months after that—when short stories were my sole means of making a living—I did not sell a single line. But that's free-lancing, as it is and as it always has been. It is the complete heart-breaker until one makes good. That is why I say that determination is of even more value than style or a free imagination.

If I were starting all over again I would make sport my subject. I would make myself an expert on racing, cricket, football, tennis and boxing. And then I would go to the editor of some big daily and tell him what I could do. I'm convinced he would pay a salary that would at least keep the wolf well away from the door. The first great sporting specialist that arises—the man or the woman who can cover Wimbledon to-day, Epsom to-morrow and Olympia at the end of the week, will be able to

pick and choose when it comes to selecting a position. Sport, even now, occupies a large portion of the daily press. In another year or so, it will be crowding out general news items.

My tip to the young man or the young woman—especially the latter—who may be searching for a subject to take up is this : Become a specialist on sport.





**THE COMMERCIAL SIDE OF  
LITERATURE**



## CHAPTER I

### THE MODERN NOVEL

"OF the making of books there is no end." The spread of popular education, the commercialisation of printing on a large scale, and the ever-growing demand for books of all kinds, especially fiction, are factors responsible for the vast increase in the number published yearly in this country. Statistics, it is said, can be made to prove anything. Certainly the increasing crop of books is evident enough without the aid of quoted figures. Reviewers are aware of it, sometimes to their sorrow. The number of new publishing firms which have come into existence in the last few years testifies to the activity if not the prosperity of the industry. The vast output of new novels is particularly significant. "The reading public has increased enormously. Every town and half the villages in England have their own library circle, where books may be read and borrowed and discussed. Every year the commercial potentialities of the successful novelist are increased." I quote the words of a well-known publisher.

Authors have sprung into being in surprisingly large numbers, and often from equally surprising sources. It is a commonplace to say that nowadays everyone

thinks he can write a book. It is a book-writing age. Practically everyone of importance has been prevailed upon (one suspects that many of them did not require much persuasion) to write his or her reminiscences. Even people of no conceivable importance have inflicted their reminiscences on the public. Presently we shall have sixth-form schoolboys unburdening their memoirs, for the craze continues.

In the field of fiction the increase in the number of novels published is even more remarkable. One artificial factor which is largely responsible for the present state of affairs—the lending libraries—we can examine later. Present day novelists are recruited—it would be nearer the mark to say that they enlist voluntarily—from all classes of society, irrespective of education, experience, or even ability. The author of *Pamela*, so often described as the father of the English novel, must surely turn in his grave unless he is mercifully unaware of the swelling heterogeneous ranks of the modern novelist.

This state of affairs is vastly encouraging to anybody with literary ambitions. The lowering of the standard of published work inevitably encourages more and more people to try their hands at getting into print. The rapid growth of journalism tempts its numerous practitioners, successful or otherwise, to turn their attention to the book world—successful journalists, often out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*; and the unsuccessful, probably because they think they may have better luck with a novel. And they very often do. From spasmodic articles the victim of *cacoethes scribendi* drifts, probably unsuccessfully, to the short story, the most

difficult literary form. then turns hopefully to the easier prospect of a novel.

Last year (1929) over 12,000 new books were published, nearly four thousand being works of fiction. Twenty-five years ago the total figure was less than 7,000. But it is not as a result of the increase in output that conditions in the publishing world have undergone such considerable change. The whole business of book publishing has become much more complicated because of developments in the value of literary property.

The cry of "too many books" is frequently raised nowadays. But in 1913 there were actually as many books issued as in 1923. And there are more bookshops now than in pre-war days. As against this, the big increase in the cost of producing books has undoubtedly tended to limit the output of publishers.

When people talk disparagingly of too many books, they usually mean too many novels. Every year sees an increase in the number of novels published. It is undoubtedly the field which attracts the largest number of new writers.

From remote and stray beginnings the novel has in recent years suddenly assumed the proportions of a literary giant. Its rapid growth and development are amazing. Of the books published since the beginning of this century, by far the largest proportion consists of works of fiction. Presumably the laws of supply and demand regulate the production of published fiction. The demand for fiction on such a wholesale scale must be due to the artificial complexities of a civilised state. Men and women, especially women, seek in the vicarious realm of fiction the wider range of human experiences

which a complex and narrowed life denies them. Having neither time nor opportunity in this crowded, hustled existence to taste the joys and sorrows, the vicissitudes and triumphs of a more elemental experience, they turn to fiction to satisfy their natural craving. Perhaps it would be truer to say that the flavour of their own experiences is lost in the monotony and proximity of ordinary everyday life. The drama of one's own personal problems and experiences is seldom realised. There is not time to relish contact with the sharper edges of life. For emotional satisfaction, civilisation-hampered people turn to fiction.

From the author's point of view this preamble may seem not altogether to the point. But so many modern novels fail through an imperfect understanding or complete ignorance of the nature and functions of the novel that the point is well worth examination. Every author who contemplates writing a novel should make sure that he or she can satisfactorily answer the question "Why do people read novels?"

A complete answer to the query would necessarily cover many varying reasons. If one could take a census of readers a surprising variety of motive would doubtless be revealed. Some readers would vaguely reply, "I want to be entertained." Others, more intelligently candid, would reply that to them fiction represented variously a temporary escape from the harsh realities and dreary monotony of their lives; an opiate, a narcotic, an intellectual stimulant. A few, perhaps unconsciously, seek the benefit of the instructional pill in the generous jam of fiction. Some read to enlarge their mental horizons, to add to their range of experience.

Others derive from novels the pleasures of observation and criticism. A not inconsiderable number of people read at any rate the works of our most fashionable novelists in order to guard against potential chinks in their conversational armour. But, fundamentally, the demand for fiction is inspired by the desire, generally subconscious, to enjoy the illusions which real life, with its disappointments and hardships, fails to give the reader. This explains the popular preference for stories with happy endings. Deprived of the satisfaction of a triumphant climax to their own efforts in life, disillusioned people turn to fiction for consolation and, by subconsciously identifying themselves with the heroes and heroines of the novel, achieve a temporary and illusory satisfaction. The majority of plays produced on the modern stage, with their artificial happy endings, fulfil the same purpose.

Not every novelist will subscribe to this theory. The realists aim at a truthful presentation of life, or of a fragment of life. They refuse to hand the reader a pair of rose-coloured spectacles. They contend that it is artistically wrong to present a falsely coloured picture of life. The novel, they submit, should truly represent life. Not for them the artificial happy ending, the conventional triumph of virtue over villainy, the careful omission of the dull or unpleasant phases of life. They prefer the science of photography to the art of crude imagery. They, in their turn, are catering for a section of the reading public which, if numerically inferior to the more popular element, is certainly entitled to be regarded as discriminating.

Commercially, of course, the comparison is significant. For every reader of Henry James and D. H. Lawrence

there are a hundred readers of Edgar Wallace and Ethel M. Dell. The contempt of some authors, whose success is artistic rather than commercial, for their more popular contemporaries is a familiar symptom. It is rather amusing. They speak disparagingly of "tripe" and "philistines" and their own inability to "write down to the public," because they fail to recognise that there is as wide a gulf between certain popular and certain artistic authors as there is between the *News of the World* and the *New Statesman*. They both appear in print, but there the resemblance ends. It is also a publishing anomaly that novels should be issued at a uniform price and in more or less uniform format.

It is, however, difficult to sympathise with the author of high artistic reputation and correspondingly small sales who tearfully laments his inability to exceed the sales of——. (Here he names bitterly one of the artistically despised but commercially flourishing "best-sellers.")

A few authors, it is quite true, have achieved both reputation and profit, but the gulf between the highbrow and the "best-seller" is so wide that very, very few can hope to bridge it. Sometimes the young novelist finds it hard to believe that certain novelists' books don't sell, in spite of eulogistic reviews in eminent journals. But good reviews do not necessarily sell books. This question of press reviews is dealt with in Chapter XI. For the present, the budding novelist must take the statement on trust. I could reveal figures which would convince the most obstinate sceptic.

It amounts to this. To sell his novel, the author must satisfy the requirements of the public. Public taste is a very difficult thing to gauge, but certain



fundamental principles are plain. I do not mean that it is only a question of assembling and mixing the necessary ingredients to produce a "best-seller." There is a good deal more in the making of saleable literature than that.

I always remember a cartoon published a few years ago by an American paper. It showed a kitchen in a chaotic state, a table stacked with dirty dishes, the floor an untidy mess of brooms, pails and other household utensils— a kitchen as dreary and dirty as could be found anywhere. In the midst of this a young domestic servant is sitting, untidy and bedraggled as the kitchen itself. Her feet are on the table, and a novel lies open on her lap. There is an ecstatic smile on her face—in striking contrast to her drab surroundings—and she is looking in imagination, depicted in the cartoon by the head of an Adonis in a cloud, at the hero of the novel she is reading. The title of the cartoon is "The Best-Seller."

That cartoon was based on an understanding of human nature. Authors who can produce the type of novel that takes the spice of dashing adventure and breathless romance into the drab alley-ways of grey lives will worry more about paying their income tax than paying their rent.

At this point it may be illuminating to go more thoroughly into this question of the "best-seller." At the outset let me disclaim any intention of trying to provide an infallible recipe for the manufacture of this coveted product. So many different and elusive factors contribute to the success of a published novel that a satisfactory analysis is impossible.

There are, however, certain readily identifiable qualities which are revealed by an examination of the

"best-seller," to have plumbed the very lowest depths of misery, to have fought against almost overwhelming odds, to have endured almost incredible misfortune, before finally arriving (in the last chapter) in the haven of permanent happiness and prosperity.

It is all very simple. The novel that sells on the scale of Ethel M. Dell just represents the ordinary human being's idea of a happy dream duly realised. It never does happen in real life ; that is why the largest numbers of readers turn to the story which supplies their need.

Less discernible, but as notable a feature of the "best-seller," is the outstanding theme, or message, or moral, call it what you will, which pervades the whole story. There is always something which lifts the story a little above the level of the ordinary tale, and which strikes a responsive note in the heart of the average reader. Often this *motif* is religious in character ; but whatever form it may take, it invariably appeals to a deep-rooted human instinct. There is inevitably something primitive in anything that appeals to people in the mass.

Finally, there is another, and a much more practical aspect of the "best-seller." I refer to its length. The average novel is about 80,000 words long. Most "best-sellers" will be found to be considerably longer. I choose a few titles at random : *If Winter Comes*, *Way of Revelation*, *The Middle of the Road*, *The Green Hat*, *Sorrell and Son*, *The Good Companions*, *Jew Süß*, *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*—all books considerably longer than the ordinary novel. The significance of this point is doubtful. Possibly it reflects the public desire for value for money ; or it may be an indication that a story which is destined to appeal to an abnormally wide circle of readers must

be constructed on a big scale. It must also be remembered that long books are not returned so quickly to the lending libraries, with the result that the libraries may have to order further supplies to meet the demands of other subscribers.

The secret of the "best-seller," however, is not to be discovered by any analysis of existing specimens. Most "best-sellers" have surprised their own authors. It is certainly true that authors who have produced a "best-seller" usually regard other of their books as more deserving of popular favour. Of one thing I am convinced; the success of any novel largely depends on the time at which it is published. *If Winter Comes* appeared at the psychological moment. So did *The Middle of the Road*. If Sir Philip Gibbs's novel had been published a year earlier, or a year later, I am sure I am right in believing that it would never have enjoyed the wide popularity it at once attained. *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published just when the time was ripe for books about the war. Better war books published before and since have already been forgotten.

For the purpose of the foregoing attempt at analysis I have dealt only with modern "best-sellers," but it must be remembered that many of the books which delighted previous generations still sell many thousands of copies a year. In such ever-popular stories as the novels of Dickens, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Don Quixote*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Rosary*, *Black Beauty*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and many others, will be found the same fundamental appeal, transcending all merits or faults of style, narrative or theme.

Then there are many authors whose popularity is

not quite so evident, but whose books are regularly sold and reprinted by the ten thousand and twenty thousand. Such authors are not generally considered to rank among the "best-sellers," but their large sales may be accounted for by the presence of best-selling qualities in their work.

One factor which undoubtedly contributes to the success or failure of a novel is its title. A happy title is a tremendous asset. Although it may be going too far to suggest that a good title will make all the difference between success and failure, the theory was recently tested in an interesting fashion. A book of short stories was published simultaneously in England and America, the English publisher choosing one title, the American publisher another. For a volume of stories it met with immediate success in this country, but in America proved an almost complete failure. With most of his edition on his hands, the American publisher took the unusual step of reissuing ~~the~~ book under the title chosen by the English publisher, with the interesting result that its sales began to ~~increase~~ immediately, and the book eventually proved ~~as~~ successful in America as in England.

The wrapper, or "jacket" as it is technically called, is also a potent selling factor. Originally devised to protect the book from becoming worn and dirty (it is still sometimes referred to as the "dust cover"), its development has been mainly pictorial, and many of the coloured designs and illustrations which adorn the paper wrapper of the modern novel are so attractive that they cannot fail to have a favourable influence on the book's sale.

Ask any publisher's traveller what a difference a good

"jacket" makes. For some novels a plain, dignified wrapper is most appropriate, but for the majority a striking picture in colours which illustrates an exciting incident in the story is more likely to attract the attention of potential readers.

It is questionable whether "readableness" has much to do with the success of a novel. Although a vigorous narrative style often contributes to a book's popularity (as, for instance, it undoubtedly did in the case of *Peter Jackson*) I doubt whether it is an essential factor. One or two recent "best-sellers" have been very poorly written. And an author like Leonard Merrick, one of the most "readable" of modern novelists, has never enjoyed the wide success he has deserved. E. M. Forster, author of that fine novel *A Passage to India*, is another eminently "readable" novelist whose reputation is on a much bigger scale than his sales.

In dealing first with the type of novel which sells on a large scale I may be neglecting the ambitions of the beginner who wants reasonably enough to learn to walk before he tries to run; in other words, to be published at all. With a clear conscience I can gladden his heart. Under present conditions it is ridiculously easy to get a novel of any merit accepted and published. I am sure that the majority of reviewers will agree with me that it is hardly necessary to qualify that statement. So much that is trivial, fatuous, uninteresting, and appallingly dull is published every year that there is hope for everybody who can wield a pen or a typewriter with mediocre efficiency to join the heterogeneous ranks of our "novelists." Callow youths, fresh from the universities; women, young and old, with more spare time than conscience;

journalists, film actors, parsons, clerks, all turn their hand to novel writing. The amazing part of it all is that publishers should be ready to risk their money in producing these futilities.

All of which will doubtless make encouraging reading for the embryo novelist. At the same time the young author may reasonably be anxious to frame his work on such lines that it will appeal to as wide a public as possible. If only it were possible to supply an infallible recipe for the production of popular fiction! Unfortunately—or fortunately—there is no royal road to success. It often happens that an author, sometimes a very well known author, deliberately sets out to manufacture a “best-seller.” He writes a story full of action, of human interest and emotional appeal, sends it off to his publisher, who reads it, and is highly enthusiastic—and what happens? The novel is published, generously advertised, probably well reviewed and—somehow or other—doesn’t “come off.” Occasionally, it is true, the attempt does succeed. I cannot help feeling that John Masefield deliberately set out to write a “selling” story in *Sard Harker*. (I may be doing Mr. Masefield an injustice, in which case I apologise). In this instance he undoubtedly succeeded; but *Sard Harker* is, I venture to say, a *tour de force*—and an exception. The most notable instance in recent years was the success of *The Green Goddess*, a play written—extraordinarily enough—by the late Mr. William Archer. It is by no means out of place to quote the success of a play, since the qualities which go to the making of a successful play are fundamentally the same as those which cause a book to sell. The trouble is that, with a few lucky exceptions, no one can

deliberately turn out a "best-seller." No one can tell beforehand which way the wind of popularity is going to blow.

It is equally true, and perhaps even more surprising, that a novel in which neither author nor publisher has any great confidence, and which is launched into the world in a spirit of hope rather than confidence, confounds all the sceptics with unaccountably large sales. It is becoming increasingly difficult in these mass production days for any novel to attain big sales without the energetic efforts of the publisher behind it. Novels that are simply published soon languish and die. But it does sometimes happen that a novel "arrives" of its own accord. Public taste is a mystery and always will be.

This aspect of the commercial side of literature will probably surprise the new author—if it is not actually bewildering—but it can have no practical interest for him. It will not teach how to write saleable work. If only as a warning, however, it is worth consideration. But, allowing for the uncertainty of publishing, it is, I think, possible to differentiate roughly between the types of novel which have (at any rate at the present time) a popular appeal and those which have not.

It is much easier to approach the question negatively. Fashions in fiction come and go. The pendulum of favour is always more or less slowly swinging, although its movement may not be clearly discernible. Certain types of novel will—one is safe in asserting—never fail to find a market. The romantic novel, the adventure story, the mystery or detective story, the humorous novel—these are assured of a consistent measure of popularity. The psychological novel on the other hand,

like the "problem" play, seems destined to have a limited vogue.

At the present time I should say that the straightforward "good story" is most in favour, with a corresponding prejudice against the psychological and often rather morbid novel. Certain types of story are difficult to place nowadays: these include historical romances, stories with a religious or spiritual bias, stories with a strong moral flavour and "pre-war" stories of any kind (*i.e.*, stories in which the action takes place prior to 1914). There are, of course, brilliant exceptions. Rafael Sabatini's historical novels sell in their many thousands, for instance.

For several years there has been a strong prejudice against volumes of short stories. Signs are not wanting that this prejudice is fast disappearing, but to-day there are very few publishers who will take the risk of publishing short stories in book form unless the author is already a novelist of some reputation. This prejudice on the part of publishers is easy to understand, for they know from experience that, generally speaking, the public will not buy volumes of short stories. A very well-known novelist of my acquaintance, whose novels touch the thirty to forty thousand mark in sales, also excels in the more difficult art of the short story. Yet neither of the two collections of short stories he has published has reached a sale of 5,000 copies. The fault lies with the public, not the publishers.

The public's dislike for short stories in book form is not difficult to explain. It is partly traditional (and tradition proverbially dies hard) and is the result of a natural reaction from the surfeit of short stories which



the 'nineties produced. For years after the boom of the 'nineties and the following decade publishers fought very shy of short stories in book form. They had ceased to be a novelty and the public soon demonstrated its lack of appreciation.

Then there has been the pernicious practice of issuing collections of stories by well known novelists. The publisher is hardly to blame for this, since what usually occurred—and unhappily continues to occur—is that the author, having written and published, probably on the strength of his reputation as a novelist, a number of magazine stories, collects them together and brings them to his publisher for publication in volume form. The publisher, being anxious not to offend his valuable author, agrees to publish them. This practice, while of immediate benefit to the author, if not to the publisher (who, in point of fact, often incurs an actual loss by publishing them), has positively injured the short story market. For it is true enough that the average novelist's attempt at a short story is nothing more nor less than a "pot-boiler," and the public is sensible enough to fight shy of a 7s. 6d. collection of pot-boilers. Besides, the reader has probably come across one or more of the said stories in magazine form and promptly resents the duplication, especially when he is asked to pay so much more for it. Very few ordinary magazine stories are worth publication in book form, and if only authors and publishers generally had been wise enough in the past to recognise this fact, we should nowadays hear considerably less of the prejudice against volumes of short stories. The truth is that the short story is an individual and rare art, entirely different from that of the novel. Happily, the situation is now

improving, and the next few years may yield better prospects for good short stories in book form.

To return to the novel, it may be useful to examine briefly the various types of story which are likely to find a market at the present time. The following chapter contains a survey of many different types of novel, which may be illuminating to the young author, who, while conscious of the desire to write, is rather vague about the form his literary expression should take. It is, however, essential to realise two fundamental truths, (1). that it is practically useless to attempt to write an uncongenial type of novel, however strong may be one's desire to produce something saleable ; and (2), that what may be marketable to-day may be commercially worthless to-morrow, and *vice versa*.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MODERN NOVEL (*continued*)

If an analysis were taken of all the novels published every year it would be found that the love interest was so strongly represented that in any survey of different types of the modern novel, pride of place must undoubtedly be given to the love story. Jane Austen, it will be remembered, once defined a novel as "a smooth tale, generally of love."

We have already seen how important is the emotional appeal to the reader, and this is reflected in the love romances which crowd the bookstalls and fill the shelves at the libraries. The demand for this type of novel is therefore so wide that the novelist who wishes his books to become a commercial success can rarely afford to overlook so profitable a field.

The love story is not so easy to write as would appear at first sight. The novice is apt to imagine that, provided all ends happily on the last page, when hero and heroine duly fall into each other's arms, that the chief requirements of the love story have been fulfilled. It is not so simple as all that. Indeed, the number of successful authors in this branch of literature is surprisingly small, for every one that succeeds there are a hundred

whose work never gets beyond the "remainder" shelves.

An analysis of published romances will show that this type of novel falls into two clearly distinguishable categories. The first group may be described as novels of sentiment; the second more properly belongs to the realistic school. From a commercial point of view the former is unquestionably the more popular. In fact, many well-known novelists, in discussing the subject, have expressed their surprise that there should be such an enormous public for novels which are so artificially sentimental that they bear absolutely no relation to real life. Yet it is so. The reader—who, it is important to remember, is always the most important factor in relation to any book—is so obviously prepared to meet the author more than half-way that no writer need hesitate to put on paper situations which could never possibly occur in real life, and may confidently portray characters indescribably puppet-like. If anyone is inclined to doubt this statement, let him ask himself whether he has ever met, or is ever likely to meet, any human being like the characters—let us say without offence—in Miss Ethel M. Dell's books.

Whether it is possible to teach oneself or to be taught how to produce a successful novel on these lines is very doubtful. I am inclined to think that it is impossible. A curious, albeit a very valuable instinct seems to be responsible for fiction of this character. There is an instance of an extraordinarily successful sentimental story written by an author still in her 'teens, who could scarcely be expected to have any real knowledge or experience of life.

If the budding author can turn his hand congenially

to fiction of this kind, it is very probable that he will find publishers eventually bidding for his books, as the demand is greatly in excess of the supply.

To dismiss the sentimental novel as "tripe" has always seemed to me to be foolish affectation—often inspired, I cannot help thinking, more by envy than any real appreciation of the true underlying significance of its appeal. The author who regards his work as a business certainly ought not to neglect so large a section of the public. The first duty of a writer is, after all, to entertain his public; and if so many readers desire to be entertained by the purely sentimental novel there is no reason to despise the books which satisfy their tastes.

It may be fashionable to decry popular taste, and to lament the fact that the public displays such a keen appreciation of stories of a low literary level, but the fact remains; and while it is deplorable that the intellectual stimulus of this type of story is practically nil, the influence that it exercises is, at any rate, wholesome enough, and certainly less pernicious than the salacious and unpleasant novel which unhappily makes so frequent an appearance nowadays in print.

The realistic type of love story is more representative of life, and consequently less popular in its appeal. The success of some books and the failure of others make it only too apparent that what the public as a whole want is not novels that represent life realistically, but novels which portray it in brighter and more artificial colours.

There is always, however, an aspect to be considered besides the merely commercial significance of a book, and no one expects authors who take their art seriously to abandon their conception of the novel in favour of more

good plot is essential; on the other hand fine writing is neither necessary nor desirable. There is the same large and loyal public awaiting the writer of entertaining detective or mystery stories. For many years many thousands of appreciative readers have enjoyed and continue to enjoy the stories of such successful exponents of the art as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Maurice Leblanc (creator of *Arsène Lupin*), Paul Gaboriau, Edgar Wallace, Sydney Horler, Agatha Christie, Stuart Martin, Isabel Ostrander (who, in her lifetime, produced—under her own name and four different *noms de plume*—ten highly successful detective and mystery novels annually), Phillips Oppenheim, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, G. K. Chesterton (with his creation of *Father Brown*), F. Britten Austin, S. S. van Dine, John Buchan and many others.

The detective story is very much more difficult to write than the ordinary adventure story. It has two essential requirements—an ingenious plot which can sustain the reader's interest until the last few lines, and an outstanding character which can grip the imagination of the reader. Very few writers succeed in both. Any magazine editor will tell you how difficult it is to obtain really effective detective stories. The average writer fails completely as a rule, because the strain of inventing a series of ingenious complications, and at the same time of presenting a forceful personality that captures the reader's imagination, proves too much for his literary powers. If I had to nominate now one type of novel or series of stories which provides the most promising openings for new writers I should unhesitatingly declare for the detective story. Whether this advice will remain sound is doubtful. I am inclined to agree with Mr. J. D.

Beresford, who says: "The craze for detective fiction must be ephemeral. There are only a limited number of plots, and although the variations may mount into thousands, they are not inexhaustible. The time will come, and that before very long, at the present rate of output, when anything approaching originality in the field will be impossible. We have had over seventy years of it, dating its inception from the publication of Emile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge*, and it is exhibiting the marks of senility, as all 'genre' novels must in the course of time. I prophesy a tremendous slump in detective fiction within the next ten years." Yet Mr. Arnold Bennett has expressed the opinion that the number of detective novels will not decrease. Time alone will tell.

Some remarkably successful detective and mystery stories have been written by authors who have won their spurs with books of a very different type. Notable examples of these in recent years are *The Grey Room*, by Eden Phillpotts; *The Red House Mystery*, by A. A. Milne; *The Florentine Dagger*, by Ben Hecht; *The Death of a Millionaire*, by G. D. H. Cole; *Crime at Diana's Pool*, and *Shot on the Downs*, by Canon Victor L. Whitechurch; and *The Viaduct Murder*, by Father Ronald A. Knox. The point is worth mentioning as indicating the relative ease with which an able or experienced writer can turn to the detective story with satisfactory results.

As a result of the war there has undoubtedly been a great increase in the demand for adventure and detective stories. The social upheaval of the war and the monotony of service at home and abroad both created and encouraged the book-reading habit; and of all types of book there was none more popular among the troops

than the novel we are now discussing. Even the Prime Minister of that day is stated on reliable authority to have read detective stories for one hour each day, however immersed he may have been in affairs of state. A later Prime Minister was observed buying Edgar Wallace's novels for a train journey. And the late President Roosevelt openly confessed his fondness for the detective story.

Turning next to the humorous novel we find once more the demand much greater than the supply. The good humorous story is a rare bird. A sense of humour is notoriously a very uncertain quantity; what will convulse one reader with mirth will leave another painfully cold. The problem which confronts the humorous writer is to present the precise blend of humour which will appeal to people in the mass—a very difficult thing to do. Of all the story-teller's gifts the ability to write a funny story is perhaps the most valuable. There is no royal road to success in this department; the proof of the pudding is in the eating. But the amateur who fondly imagines that it is a comparatively simple matter to sit down and reel off a humorous story is going to be speedily disillusioned. The only sound advice one can give the would-be writer of humour is not to persevere if the result is not a spontaneous success—in the judgment of other people. The small but select band of successful humorists—W. W. Jacobs, Stephen Leacock, "Saki" (the late H. H. Munro), A. A. Milne, P. G. Wodehouse, Ben Travers—may be taken as both an encouragement and a warning: to the genuine new humorist a handsome return for his work, and to the unlucky recruit—grievous disappointment.



The psychological novel—about which we used to hear so much—has rather fallen from grace in the last few years. The study of the motives which actuate men and women is naturally a subject of unfailing interest to the intelligent reader, but the success of what is rather loosely labelled the psychological novel depends so much on convincing characterisation that only in the hands of a master of the novelist's art can it hope to prove effective. Psychological studies without the framework of a good story are apt to be tedious and only a gifted craftsman can be expected to combine the two.

Scarcely anything is heard nowadays of the "problem" novel which, in the 'nineties, had such a great vogue. The older generation will remember the sensation then caused by Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins*. The problem novel illustrated the inevitable reaction against Victorianism, which, in its turn, has passed away. To the student of fiction, the problem novel is interesting, however, as having dealt the death-blow to the old three volume novel.

A type of novel which, although it reproduces the earliest form of published fiction, is probably destined to flourish perennially, is the picaresque novel. As no complication of plot, no artificial handling of suspense or situations is allowable, merely a plain narration of events in chronological order, this type of story depends more on the interest of its subject matter than on treatment. Modern examples are Mr. Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* and Mr. J. B. Priestley's *The Good Companions*. In a sense the picaresque novel is the nearest approach to true realism, since incidents may follow each other in the inconsequential manner of real life. It is

not an easy form to handle successfully. The reader has to be intensely interested in the story's characters—no easy thing to sustain for three hundred pages or more.

The romance, although often attempted, is rarely successful in the hands of the novice. In the effort to achieve originality of theme or plot, the beginner is often tempted to try his hand at the purely imaginative story. The incredibility of a story is not the reason for the failure of the majority of such attempts; indeed, the reader is perfectly willing to accept any hypothesis, however fantastic, if subsequent events in the story are consistent with the original conception. He will cheerfully project himself into another world, or will readily believe in the existence of fictional ghosts or weird creatures in expectation of a satisfying story. The writer's difficulties are obvious. He may have the requisite imagination, but must be able to control it in a logical way, as well as to give it expression. The classic romances of Mr. H. G. Wells—*The War of the Worlds*, *The Time Machine*, *The Wonderful Visit* and the rest—illustrate the difficulties as well as the possibilities of this form. The publisher usually has an open mind in regard to stories of this type.

The historical novel is something of a paradox at the present time. On the one hand there is so little demand for historical novels that only a few publishers will consider them in manuscript form; on the other hand, there are the outstanding successes of authors like Mr. Rafael Sabatini, Mr. Jeffery Farnol and Miss Marjorie Bowen.

"The historical novel," says Mr. Frank Swinnerton, "is, like grand opera, something of a hybrid. It is neither a novel nor a history, but suffers from the defects of both forms of art. It must be about real people, set in a real

scene, doing real things ; and in addition it must have a background of history which will bear at least the scrutiny of the simple-minded (who are most severe critics)."

Although several historical romances have been successful in recent years (notably *Jew Süß* and *The Ugly Duchess* by Dr. Lion Feuchtwanger, and *General Crack* and *The Rocklitz* by "Mr." George Preedy), it can safely be said that the historical novel is temporarily out of favour. One possible explanation of its decline is the comparative excitement of the times in which we live. In more leisured days the historical novel will probably attain greater popularity.

An increased interest in social problems, and a deeper realisation of the common difficulties of humanity, caused by the upheaval of the war, is no doubt responsible for the popularity of novels which reflect the wider aspect of human difficulties.

The novel which is merely propaganda stands little chance of success. But the novel which, in the form of a story worth reading for its own sake (the point deserves emphasis), throws light on the problems of humanity is likely to win a large number of readers. We are no longer living in a state of superficial peace and contentment. Civilisation has come unstuck, and there is a hearing for the writer who can effectively utilise one of the many social and other problems which engage widespread attention to-day.

The sporting novel logically belongs to the group of adventure and kindred novels, but is worth special attention. There is a very much bigger public for novels with a sporting theme than many writers realise. Special

emphasis must again be laid on the importance of getting one's local colour right in every detail. No writer of racing stories has any chance of real success unless his details are absolutely correct. And it is fatally easy to go wrong unless one has a thorough knowledge of the subject. One quite eminent novelist who attempted and published a racing yarn a few years ago made his hero run a four-year-old gelding in the Derby—a howler which would either amuse or disgust any Turf enthusiast. On the other hand, those writers who know the ground can, and usually do, turn their hand with advantage to the writing of sporting novels. Nat Gould had an enormous public; it is still there awaiting his successor. In the realm of boxing fiction T. C. Wignall and Andrew Soutar (and, of course, Conan Doyle with his *Rodney Stone*) are conspicuously successful; as are the football stories of Sydney Horler, E. C. Buley, the racing novels of J. Crawford Fraser, Countess Barcynska, Edgar Wallace, and E. C. Buley; the hunting yarns of Whyte Melville, Æ. Somerville, Dorothea Conyers, Edward Woodward and others. For those who can handle such themes effectively the sporting novel is a tempting proposition.

Juvenile fiction is in a class by itself. Only a very small proportion of the stories for children that are written ever find their way into print. It is curious how many amateur writers embark on their literary careers with this unpromising material. It is difficult to place, often impossible; and the prices paid are often absurdly low. And although it may appear a simple matter to write a story which will appeal to children, it is in reality very difficult. A few publishers specialise in "juveniles,"

but outside this number there is practically no market for them. The majority of children's stories are bought for an outright payment, which is not encouraging to the author. Serial rights, however, are sometimes valuable, although respectable rates are the exception rather than the rule. Successful practitioners whose work is worth study are Eleanor Farjeon, Rose Fyleman, Olwen Bowen, Hugh Lofting, and the late Marion St. John Webb.

The war novel is an interesting illustration of the difficulty of overcoming the prejudices of publishers once they are formed. As was only to be expected, a strong reaction against war stories set in a year or two after the Great War and the pendulum is only just beginning to swing back. The same obstinate prejudice has prevailed for the past few years among theatrical managers and magazine editors. Yet the first war play to be produced in the post-war period—*Havoc*—was an instant success. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that film producers did not share the view of publishers and theatre managers, as witness the production—and, more significant, the success—of war films like *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *Enemies of Women*, etc. It is, however, almost certain that the war novel is on the point of returning to favour. I feel sure that several notable novels of the war will be published within the next year or two. So far the war has produced only a few outstanding novels—Gilbert Frankau's *Peter Jackson*, Wilfred Ewart's *Way of Revelation*, perhaps H. G. Wells' *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, *The Spanish Farm* by R. H. Mottram, Cecil Roberts' *Scissors*, of which the vivid last chapters entitle it to inclusion; in America, *Three Soldiers* by John dos Passos; and in France, Barbusse's *Le Feu*. There is a

wonderful opportunity awaiting the unknown writer inspired by the war.\*

There are many other types of novel which necessarily elude even the vague classification attempted in the foregoing pages. Indeed, the novel is not something that can be precisely labelled. Publishers and booksellers do however, attempt some such classification, more for purposes of convenient reference than anything else. Provided this is understood there can be no harm in roughly indicating, as I have tried to do, the prospects of each type of novel in turn. Innumerable novels defy classification, and of these it can only be said that they must stand or fall on their merits as novels. The novel is nowadays so elastic a form of expression that the designation covers with equal readiness the autobiography of a charwoman or the story of a man's life told backwards. The word novel may mean anything.

To realise how unwise it would be to attempt to dogmatise about any particular type of novel, one has only to recall an observation once made by an eminent publisher. In 1896, the late Mr. John Lane declared that "the sex novel was played out"!

A word is necessary about the "first novel." The risks of publishing a novel by a new and unknown author are greater to-day than ever before, but it is an encouraging indication of the real earnestness of publishers that the promising first novelist is most eagerly sought after. The novelist who makes more than say, forty or fifty

\* These lines were written in 1925. Since then there has been a boom in war books which now (1930) seems to be dying out. "All Quiet on the Western Front," which began the boom, made a fortune for its author; several other war novels have proved best-sellers, yielding reputation and profit to authors previously unknown.

pounds out of his first effort may be reckoned fortunate. It is the possibilities latent in his future work which tempt the publisher to speculate—for in nine cases out of ten it is speculation—in a “first novel.” Some publishers are more interested in first novels than others, and the writer should use discrimination in submitting the first product of his typewriter.

So many of the first novels which are submitted to publishers have shown a tendency to fall short of the customary novel length that a cautionary word is necessary. The average length of the 7s. 6d. novel is about 80,000 words. Seventy thousand words should be regarded as a minimum; most publishers prefer novels not longer than about 100,000 words, but if a book runs to 120,000 words even, its length does not put it out of court. Which shows that while the publisher will accept a novel longer than the average, in spite of the necessarily increased cost of production, a novel which falls under the average total of words is unwelcome, for this reason—he cannot sell it. Novels are published at the uniform price of 7s. 6d., and the bookseller insists on “bulk.” Authors would have an eye-opener if they watched the bookseller “buying.” He looks first at the author’s name and the publisher’s imprint, then the title and the jacket, but never omits to note the “bulk” or thickness of the book, and the size of print and margins. If the number of pages falls short of the average or the type is unusually large, he has very little use for that particular book. The actual story is of minor interest.

This prejudice is really fundamentally sound. The public, too, like “value for money,” and many readers will neither buy nor borrow from their library a book

which they can see will not provide a full quota of reading entertainment. This applies particularly to books by comparatively unknown authors, so that it is important for the novice to understand the necessity for writing a "full" book.

Occasionally a 40,000 word novel is published—usually at 3s. 6d. in the first instance—but this as a rule proves to be the type of story which can be labelled a "book-stall" book as opposed to a "library" book—a novel of Wild West adventure, for instance, which people are more likely to buy at a railway bookstall than put down on their library lists.

What the future holds is a subject for speculation. The late Stacy Aumonier, who was a novelist as well as a recognised master of the art of the short story, expressed this point of view :

I think we may assert without fear of contradiction that a long work is not necessarily a profound work. A Tanagra statuette may be more beautiful and profound in thought, feeling and emotion than one of those monster conceptions of Mestrovic, or even than the Pyramids of Egypt. . . .

Mr. Galsworthy once told me that he considered that the most satisfactory length to express oneself in fiction is the story of between twenty and twenty-five thousand words. Now, coming from such an authority, this is an interesting pronouncement, and I venture to predict, having seriously endeavoured to adjust Mr. Galsworthy's opinion to modern tendencies in fiction, that the next boom will be in stories of this length. It may not be for a year or two, but it will come. At the present time it is extremely difficult to be allowed to write such a story. Editors, publishers and literary agents are not used to it. They say : " But what's the good of this ? It's too long for a story, and too short for a novel."

Well, it is up to them to find a way of dealing with it, for it is undeniably an excellent length for a work of fiction, and there is



going to be a demand for it. Mr. Galsworthy himself, and also Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, have all written a number of stories of approximately this length.

It seems to be the length that lends itself to a *tour de force*. It gives the author the chance of getting more stuff into it, more actuality, than he is able to within the limitations of the short story. On the other hand, he is not tempted to be diffuse, as he so often is in a long novel. From the reader's point of view, it has one great recommendation. It is exactly the length to read between dinner-time and bed. It is more satisfactory to go to bed with the vivid impression of one story on your mind, rather than the confusing memory of four, or the tantalising impression of part of one.

This prediction was made some years ago. But although various attempts have been made to popularise the short novel, the full-length story still continues to hold the field, and the potential novelist cannot afford to give short measure at the present time.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BOOK MARKET

ALTHOUGH the novel may claim to be regarded as the most important of all the single groups into which books may be divided, both from the point of view of the number published each year and the amount of interest devoted to fiction by the reading public, the field is almost as large for the writer of the non-fiction type of book. Indeed, in many ways the non-fiction market offers a wider choice and a more varied market than does the novel.

The non-fiction book, by which is meant all books that are not novels, may be sub-divided under ten separate heads. They are: (1), Memoirs or Reminiscences; (2), Biographies; (3), *Belles Lettres*; (4), Travel and Topography; (5), Technical books; (6), Poetry; (7), Educational works; (8), Political; (9), Economics; and (10), Translations. These ten classes of books, with the obvious exception of poetry, may be said to have one thing in common—they are all examples of what may be called advanced journalism. In all of them the qualifications required are in one way or another the same qualifications indispensable to success in journalism—that is, the ability to describe scenes or incidents in the way best calculated to hold the reader's interest, a sense

of news values—which is to the author what a sense of proportion is to any human being—and, equally important, the knowledge that enables the writer to know what to leave out.

This last qualification is as important as knowing what to put in. Indeed, any experienced reviewer will probably agree that more otherwise good books have been spoiled because the author did not know what to leave out, than because vital facts were not put in. An important point left out is easily discernible to the practised eye, whereas the superfluous anecdote, the hoary chestnut in an otherwise admirable book of reminiscences, or the biography filled with trivial and largely uninteresting matter, often escapes the blue pencil and appears in print. The very fact that in most instances the non-fiction book possesses no "plot" worthy of the name makes this question more important. If the action flags in the middle of a novel, the first critic to whom the author turns for advice will detect the fault and it can be corrected, but in the case of books dealing with facts, or anecdotes, or the fruits of travel and exploration, to decide what is superfluous and what isn't is not so easy. For the author who is aiming at success in the non-fiction field, perhaps the best advice is indicated by the old Fleet Street adage, "When in doubt—out." A story or point of argument never printed is never missed, whereas a story not up to the standard of the rest of a book, or an argument dragged in unnecessarily, may prejudice the reader and reviewer and materially affect the prospects of the book.

Before passing on to deal with the various types of non-fiction book in detail it must be pointed out that not

all of these offer immediate results to the newcomer to literature. Memoirs and reminiscences are generally out of reach of the literary aspirant, and biography is also a field which calls for an established literary reputation, or at all events a special knowledge of the subject. It is true that one young man wrote his reminiscences at the age of twenty, but the success of this precocious volume was an exception. It proved the soundness of the rule that those who dabble in biographies and memoirs should have a respectable measure of years and experience to their credit.

In the same way poetry must be left to poets, and even the most enthusiastic and talented writer must not expect to be able to take advantage of whatever scope this field offers unless he is one of those fortunate beings born with the magic gift of poetry.

Despite these limitations, however, those who contemplate a literary career, or who are now engaged on one, would be well advised to make themselves conversant with the whole field of non-fiction books, in order that they may know how wide the field is, and what the prospects are. If there is one thing true of authors as a whole it is the fact, in the words of the wit, that if every writer could know what he was destined to write when first he put pen to paper, authorship would have been numbered among the dead arts centuries ago. It is the uncertainty of the future which invests authorship with much of its charm, and for that reason no field of effort should be left unexplored by the aspirant for literary reputation.

Memoirs and reminiscences are a steadily growing class of non-fiction book. They may be written by anybody or nobody, provided always that that nobody has

mixed with interesting and important people, or in some way enjoyed unique experiences denied to most, and therefore interesting when set down in print. Principally, however, this type of book is the work of someone whose name is well known to the reading public. Famous politicians, doctors, authors, business men, sportsmen, soldiers, sailors, Civil Servants, travellers, clergymen, actors, war correspondents, lawyers—all these vocations have contributed to the successful memoirs and books of reminiscences published during recent years. To-day the great, and the nearly great, announce the coming of their reminiscences with an inevitableness that suggests that before long, with competition as keen as it is in the publishing world, the successful man or woman will sign a contract for what is usually a form of life story at an early age and thus be relieved of further worry apart from the task of sitting down to produce the book when the joys of more strenuous activities have waned.

Indeed, this is what already happens in many cases. Miss Mary Pickford, the famous screen star, had signed a contract for her reminiscences with an American publishing house many years ago, when, although famous, she was not at the top of her profession. In the same way the modern Cabinet Minister accepts office knowing, and appreciating, that when his turn comes to "go into the wilderness" of opposition or retirement, there will be a ready market for the book in which he will tell the story of his stewardship, with such permissible brushing aside of the cloak of secrecy as may add a spice of interest to the record.

There are, of course, some lucky people who are assured of success before they sit down to write the first

chapter of their reminiscences. Lord Curzon of Kedleston would have been reasonably sure of receiving at least £10,000 for the serial and book rights of his memoirs. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is stated, with good authority, to have received half-a-crown a word for the British serial rights of his reminiscences. Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Winston Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, and other politicians are very highly paid for their literary work. But these distinguished authors are in a privileged class. For years they have been in the limelight. The public knows them and is eager to know how much they know in turn. So a publisher is justified in preparing a big first edition of any book they write. For the comparatively unknown writer the task is not so easy, nor the reward so great.

Anyone who has a story to tell, and can tell it in an interesting fashion, can write a novel. In the same way, anyone whose life has been uncommonly interesting is qualified, given the necessary writing ability, to write his or her reminiscences, but the material must be there—it cannot be manufactured or invented. An interesting life spent in contact with interesting and famous people is essential. So is either a good memory for details, or a carefully kept diary. Nothing is so damaging to an otherwise good book of reminiscences or memoirs as vagueness. If the book is sufficiently interesting to attract the very large public which appreciates life at second-hand in this form, then the monetary results will be well worth while. Most books of this description are published at a price between 10s. 6d. and 30s., which, on a royalty basis, will well repay the author for the amount of research work necessary to compile from 75,000 to 100,000 words of material.

Of all types of non-fiction books, memoirs make the greatest appeal to the majority of publishers. If you have any notion that in the years to come your autobiography will be worth publishing, begin by keeping a diary to-day. A little time spent in collecting material while it is fresh in the mind may save months of research and reflection in the years to come—and enable an author finally to crown his literary achievements by a successful book of reminiscences.

Biographies offer a wider field, and one which the young writer can enter on equal terms. Whether or not a famous public figure has written a volume of reminiscences during his lifetime, it is probable that a biography covering his whole life will appear after his death. In many cases such a biography could not be written except by a writer who has the privilege of access to the letters, documents and other material left by the subject of the book, and also to family records needed to piece together the early and obscure beginnings of someone who later became famous. But there are other famous men—statesmen and politicians, for example—whose whole lives, apart from a few early years, are lived in the full glare of publicity. A complete collection of press cuttings concerning these men and women would furnish, with a few intimate touches such as any friend could supply, an almost complete biography of their lives. Here is the opportunity for the young writer in this field. As an example I may recall the somewhat surprising fact that when Mr. Ramsay MacDonald became the first Socialist Prime Minister of Great Britain, very few people knew more about him, outside the Labour movement itself, than the fact that he was a Scot, who had for a time been

rather unpopular on account of his anti-war activities. A Fleet Street journalist, whose work had brought him into contact with Mr. MacDonald, and who had for some time past carefully studied the life of the Socialist leader with an eye on the possibility of good "copy" at some future date, set to work, and in a week produced a really excellent biography of the Prime Minister. This was duly published in a Sunday newspaper and afterwards in pamphlet form, and the results well repaid the journalist-author for his work.

It is, I believe, a fact that what was by far the best biography of the ex-Kaiser to appear in this country was also the work of an author who had collected his material from afar without any intimate knowledge of his subject. The war came, and he wrote the book, which went into several editions in a few weeks.

'These are examples of the biography which deal with a living person. Where it is a life-story in the real sense, and the subject is dead, the task is harder, and generally, in the absence of special access to the necessary documents, or a very close and long standing friendship, it is better left alone. It is not a field which offers as much promise of financial reward as many others in the non-fiction market, but a good biography, sympathetically and worthily treated, is an achievement well worth while, and, for that reason alone, an eligible branch of activity which should not be neglected.

Under the heading of *Belles Lettres* are included sketches, essays, reviews, and letters on art, literature, and life. This is a difficult field. Generally speaking, a name familiar to the discriminating reading public is needed to obtain recognition. But once this is achieved



*Belles Lettres* offer wide possibilities both in profit and prestige. An example of a modern writer who has won substantial recognition in this field of non-fiction books is Mr. E. V. Lucas, whose essays, travel sketches, and criticisms on art and kindred topics have a wide sale both in this country and America, and have increased his reputation. Another popular essayist is Mr. G. K. Chesterton, whose work needs no description. Hilaire Belloc and A. G. Gardiner ("Alpha of the Plough") are other names which come to mind of writers whose contributions to the *Belles Lettres* of our time will not only live after many modern novels are forgotten, but prove that this highly specialised field is well worth consideration.

• A much larger section is that covered by books dealing with travel and topography. To-day it would seem that everyone of us is either a traveller or a reader of travel books. At all events, the number of such books published in this country is becoming steadily larger year by year, and more and more of the "best-sellers" among non-fiction books belong to this category.

• It is obvious that first-hand knowledge of the subject is essential before a travel book can be attempted. It is useless to sit at home and try to write a book about the Solomon Islands, or the Tekel Makan Desert of Northern China. Sincerity and accuracy in detail are the outstanding requirements of the travel book, and without these success is unlikely. Assuming, however, that the author has lived for some years abroad, there is hardly a spot on the earth's surface that will not, treated in the right way, yield a fascinating book for the stay-at-home public. A good travel book, especially if well illustrated with

either photographs or sketches, or both, is also reasonably sure to find a publisher, without so great an effort as is often required in the case of other books." Wireless, aviation, education, all these things are helping to make the world smaller and to increase, therefore, the interest which the reading public takes in other parts of the world. Louis de Rougemont created a sensation with his remarkable stories of life in Northern Australia (since justified by the evidence of the moving picture camera) because no one else had been there and seen what he had seen.

- That spirit of curiosity is more alive than ever to-day. In spite of the increased cost of the illustrated book, the demand for books dealing with the romance of such parts of the globe as Unknown Africa, the South Seas, the Dominions, the Amazon, Northern Canada, and the Far East is still greater than the supply. It can almost be said that no really well written and informative travel book is to-day a failure—no matter what part of the world it deals with there is a public somewhere for it. But to win that public the author must do his duty. Exaggeration, invention, padding—these tendencies must be sternly suppressed. The book must be a faithful and full picture of life in the country concerned, illustrated wherever possible with actual photographs or drawings that confirm or support the text. A good travel book of this description is usually assured of a large sale in the United States as well as in this country, and more than one now successful author's name first became known, for journalistic purposes at least, through the appearance of a book of this nature:

Allied to the travel book dealing with one country

is the book that deals with none particularly, but rather with the reminiscences of the author as a rolling stone, travelling the world at large, and winning experience as the fruit of many adventures in strange lands. The market for this type of book is as large as that open to the travel book proper, but it is not a market which is open to every author, for the obvious reason that it would not be possible or profitable for a writer to spend two or three years of his life drifting round the world in order to write such a book. Unless, therefore, his experience has lain in unexpected places, and the material is ready to his hand, the beginner would be well advised to pass over the travel book, merely noting its possibilities in order that if, on some future occasion, he gains a first-hand knowledge of more or less unknown parts of the world, he may turn that knowledge to practical account.

The wide range of books grouped together under the general heading of technical books also form a market dominated by the specialist. It is useless for the uninformed to attempt to prepare a book dealing with, say, wireless or printing. Nevertheless, it is a market which should be cultivated by those possessing the necessary knowledge. An author who some years ago wrote what is now a favourite history book for school use has for many years past been receiving an annual payment for royalties of nearly £500 a year. This is but one example of the outstanding attraction which the technical book has to the writer able to compete in this field—a steady sale which may continue for years if the book has any claim to permanence of interest.

Just as everyone who is anyone could write at least one

book of reminiscences, so nearly every writer is the master of one subject which might be turned into a technical book. Wireless, tennis, cricket, dancing, football, motor-ing, gardening, engineering, photography, spiritualism—there is no end to the possible subjects for technical books, as is shown by the steady stream of these publications which regularly flow from the printing presses. But, to sound a note of warning, publishers usually demand a well-known “name” on the title-page of books of this type—a name already associated with the subject in the minds of the public.

There is a surprisingly large public for this kind of book. Sales totalling 50,000, and even 100,000 in the case of the cheaper books, are comparatively common, while surprisingly large profits have been earned over and over again from the serial and other rights of these books.

Poetry can be called the most highly specialised type of non-fiction. *Poeta nascitur non fit*. There is a tendency on the part of many modern writers to dismiss poetry with a shrug of the shoulders, or a suggestion that poetry and poverty go well together. Yet it must be remembered that Mr. Rudyard Kipling has made nearly as much out of poetry as he has made out of prose, while such authors as John Masefield, John Drinkwater, and Sir Henry Newbolt have probably made far more. Even so shrewd a judge of the modern public as Mr. Gilbert Frankau has deemed it worth his while to turn to poetry upon occasion, as witness that notable novel in verse *One of Us*, which added to his reputation. But from a strictly commercial point of view, poetry to-day yields practically no dividends.

Following the war there was a "boom" in poetry—at least that was what it was called by some enthusiastic critics. But the only effect of the boom, if there ever was one, was that certain publishers became a little more inclined to publish books of poems at their own risk instead of making the author pay to see his work in print and recouping him on a royalty basis. To-day it is not always necessary for a poet of any distinction to pay for the publication of his work. If a poet has a certain reputation, or is spoken of as "a coming man," it is possible to find a publisher who will run the risk of launching him. But the field is limited and precarious.

Some interesting facts and figures concerning the commercial side of poetry appeared in an illuminating article in the London *Evening Standard*. I quote the following significant passage:

Let me take one concrete instance, in which I have the facts from the author's own mouth. Of the merits of his work I will say nothing; I will keep as closely as possible to facts. He is a man of about thirty. He has three or four volumes of verse to his name, for the publication of none of which has he incurred any risk. He is to be found in the usual books of reference. Specimens of his work are reproduced in most of the anthologies. When he writes a poem he can generally, though not always, obtain a fee for it from some magazine. His name is fairly well known to those interested in literature. He is, that is to say, a reasonably successful member of his profession—which term I use to keep well on the prosaic side of my subject. There are those who do better financially, but I should think that here he is above the average, and these are his receipts for last year

|   | £     | s. | d. |
|---|-------|----|----|
| To royalties from books already published .. ..                       | 3     | 12 | 0  |
| To fees for publication in periodicals:                               |       |    |    |
| 1 poem at £5 .. .   |       |    |    |
| 1 poem at £4 .. .   |       |    |    |
| 8 poems at £2 2s. each .. }   | 31    | 6  | 0  |
| 2 poems at £2 each .  |       |    |    |
| 1 poem at £1 10s. .   |       |    |    |
| To fees for publication in anthologies:                               |       |    |    |
| 7 poems at £2 2s. each .. ..  | 14    | 14 | 0  |
| To fees for poems set to music:                                       |       |    |    |
| 2 poems at £2 2s. each .. ..  | 4     | 4  | 0  |
| To receipts from anthologies published on a profit-sharing base .. .. | 9     | 18 | 0  |
|   | <hr/> |    |    |
|   | £63   | 14 | 0  |

And every three years or so he will publish a new collection of verses, from which he will get in royalties, at the first go-off, about £15. If we distribute this at the rate of £5 per annum, his yearly earnings from the writing of verse (or, as he would say, poetry) amount to £68 14s.

I will not attempt to apportion this under the headings of rent, heat and light, washing, etc. As a matter of fact, my friend does not support himself, let alone his wife, on a yearly income of £68 14s. But to support himself at all one of two things is necessary. Either he must have an independent income—and in an illogical world this is not an inevitable accompaniment of poetic talent—or he must have some other and more remunerative occupation.

There you have a lucid summary of the opportunities open to the aspiring poet who seeks literary honours—and profit—by the writing of verse. There is a market for poetry, but it is a restricted market, with few opportunities of material success. Whether the artistic satisfaction of self-expression is sufficient reward for the

labour involved is a question which every author contemplating the practice of the poetic art must decide for himself. But, if money is the attraction, then it is undoubtedly possible for any writer whose work is worth printing to secure bigger rewards for less expenditure of effort elsewhere in the literary field.

Turning to the educational field, we are considering a wide market about which surprisingly little is known by the average writer. And yet this branch of non-fiction has one outstanding recommendation from the point of view of the young author. The demand for educational books is probably more constant than is the case in any other field. There are no booms and slumps facing the specialist who has won a market for his wares in the schools, colleges, and homes of Great Britain. There is always a next generation to follow the last one, always the same "continuous urge," as Mr. H. G. Wells has called it, towards knowledge. It naturally follows, therefore, that the market for instructional books does not grow smaller; indeed, it expands with the population.

The educational book, whether it is of the "popular" variety or not, is rarely a "best-seller" in the sense of running through five or six editions in as many months. In a conservative market it takes time to win your place as a writer of worth—time and a passion for accuracy down to the smallest detail. But if it were possible to compile a list of the fifty biggest sellers among books in this country, with the number of copies of each sold, the average author would be surprised to discover how many educational works figured in the list. Such standard works as H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* and

Green's *History of England* have established their position in the ranks of the books that help to make the man, and these books enjoy a steady sale year after year, and will prove vigorous sellers years after the meteoric novel published on the same day has sold its five or ten, or even twenty thousand copies and, its little day over, passed into the limbo of forgotten books.

Not everyone, of course, is able to write books of an educational or even informative nature. More than any other type of book, the text-book must be impartial, even judicial, in its handling of facts, sincere in its tone, and have a fine sense of proportion. Anything in the nature of hurried or slipshod work will effectually rob the book of its chances. Moreover, it is of vital importance that those who write to instruct, rather than to amuse, should have a complete knowledge of their subject, and beyond that knowledge a vision of the lesson they wish to teach their readers. The educational market is, in other words, a very exacting, possibly the most exacting, market. Nevertheless, it is a field in which there are rich rewards for those who are successful. A book which attracts the public may sell steadily for ten or twenty years, earning substantial royalties for the author.

\*The political book may consist of reminiscences, biography, educational material, or deal with some specific problem or series of problems which engage the attention of politicians of the day. The first three types have already been dealt with in this chapter, and I will not discuss them further. There is no subject so sure of a public as politics of any sort. To take a very improbable example, it is obvious that if a Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote a book entitled *How to Abolish the Income*



*Tax* and published it a week before the Budget speech was due, the only limit to the sales of the book would be the number of copies that could be printed and bound. To a lesser degree there is the same sure public for any political book that imparts expert knowledge, or sheds light on any subject which is politically topical or of genuine interest. Even the views of comparatively minor politicians are eagerly read by the large public which is "politically conscious," a fact which has encouraged publishers in many cases to charge prices for these books of political reminiscences which they could not successfully demand for any other type of book.

Whether the problem dealt with is great or small, however, and whether the writer is comparatively unknown or famous, it is essential that the book itself should be comprehensive. Books of a general nature, written without the most expert knowledge, will never make any author's reputation in the political market. A complete mastery of the subject is an essential qualification. The scope of politics is so vast to-day that even within the great political parties each subject is recognised as a specialist's province, with little groups of members detailed to make themselves conversant with their own particular subject. No man is any longer expected to be an expert on, say, housing, Egypt, and the licensing laws at the same time. In the same way the writing of political books is a specialist's work that demands detailed knowledge of both sides of a question and the highly developed art of presenting a case.

The best way to write a political book dealing with a controversial question is undoubtedly to make it a measured statement of facts, attractively presented, and, after

elaborating your views, leave the facts to speak for themselves. That sounds an easy matter, yet it is rarely so easy as it looks.\* It is said, for instance, that no man—not even Mr. Ramsay MacDonald himself—has yet been able to write a book on Socialism which will explain what the aims of British Socialists really are in language that the man in the street can understand. It is not that men like Mr. Robert Blatchford, Mr. Philip Snowden, Mr. W. H. Morris, the late Keir Hardie, and Mr. MacDonald himself—to mention only one or two writers who have written books on this subject—are unable to write. It is due to the simple fact that Socialism itself is so involved a project, meaning so many things to so many different people, that it is difficult to set down its aims in simple language.

When the miners were pressing their scheme for the nationalisation of the coal industry some years ago, several books were written on the coal-mining industry in this country, in the hope that the public would read them and thus gain a detailed knowledge of the facts upon which they could give a considered opinion upon the question. It is extremely doubtful, however, if any of the authors who wrote those books made as much money as they could have done by devoting half the time to journalism. But they were experts dealing with an expert subject, and if their sales were small the position attained by their books gave them a prestige which was otherwise useful.

The political book which has something to reveal, or some bitterly opposed policy to defend, is in a different category. This is, for the author lucky enough to possess the facts at the right moment, probably the safest and

most profitable book of any type on the market. Secrets have always had, and probably always will have, a ready sale, and Government secrets are no exception. Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*, published in Britain and nine other countries before the war, is an example of this type of book. In the same way to-day, were this country suddenly to find itself threatened with a measure of Prohibition, a well written and detailed book on the whole question of the drink question, both in Britain and other countries, would almost certainly bring in substantial profits for its author.

It is obvious, however, that only those writers who are actively interested in politics, and have made themselves specialists in their subject, can hope to win either prestige or profit out of political books. It is, more than any other class of book, a market in which specialists cater for specialists, and where the lightest statement may be X-rayed under the fierce light that beats upon the party leaflet and the platform speech when a general election comes. A mis-statement, therefore, may not only be damaging to the author, but it may, and probably will, actually set back rather than advance whatever cause the author has at heart.

Before leaving the political book and turning to its cousin, the volume that deals with economic questions, it is perhaps worth calling the attention of the young author to an interesting fact. With the ever-increasing size of the electorate, now amounting practically to adult suffrage, there has arisen a demand for political books of a more popular type. These books are really super-journalism dealing in a straightforward fashion with various political problems of interest to the man in the

street. They are not intended to be text-books for the election agent and speaker but are aimed at the electorate itself in just the same way as the speeches made from time to time by the party leaders aim far beyond the hall in which they are speaking, to millions of voters who can be reached *via* radio or the press. This is a type of political book for which there is likely to be a big future, and one that the author, shy of setting himself up as an expert for experts, might profitably keep in mind if his politics are of the vital and imperative type that sooner or later break out on paper.

Like the political book, economics is a subject not for every pen. A famous statesman once referred to decimals as "those damned dots." The writer on economic questions deals with little else but "damned dots" from the cradle to the grave. The economic book should not be dismissed for this reason, however, as a market offering no opportunities to a young writer prepared to take pains to master his subject. The world in which we live is a far more complicated and industrialised world than it was fifty years ago. In twenty years' time it will be more complicated and industrialised than ever. And the more complicated it becomes the greater will be the need for books explanatory and critical of human society. The economic book has very aptly been described as "the guide book to industrial progress." Every year, every month, the trend of industrial development is slowly but surely changing. Now one trade is enjoying a boom, now another is suffering from a mysterious depression. It is the economist in his watch-tower who must read the signs that reveal the health of industry and give the facts to the world. And as the world, or most of it, lives by

and on industry, it cannot afford to ignore the reasoned views of its prophets.

If a young author with a taste for statistics asked me to suggest a profitable market to cultivate during the next ten years I should probably reply, "Economics." The world of to-morrow will see the scientist and the economist leading human progress, guiding the deliberation of Governments and husbanding our trade and prosperity for the common benefit. A few years of study and the young writer will find himself on the threshold of an almost limitless field in which there are opportunities in plenty. Even to-day there are many writers who find it possible almost to confine their activities to this field, e.g., Mr. Harold Cox, Mr. J. M. Keynes, Mr. G. D. H. Cole, Sir Leo Chiozza Money, Mr. R. H. Tawney, Sir William Beveridge and Sir Walter Layton, to mention but a few representative names.

The economic book is especially interesting in that it offers an opportunity for writers with experience in industry to enter the literary field. Indeed, the greater their experience in the industrial field, both in this country and abroad, the greater the chance of success and a profitable career. That all economics are not for highbrows is proved by the success of *Eclipse or Empire*, a book issued during the war by Samuel Turner and H. H. Grey, which had a widespread sale both in this country and the Dominions, and Stephen Leacock's "Economic Prosperity of the British Empire," which came at a moment when Empire trade was being eagerly debated and which supplied facts not previously available to the man in the street. To quote another school of economists, there are the books in which Mr. G. D. H.

Cole, Lord Passfield, better known as Sidney Webb, R. H. Tawney, and Mr. Norman Angel have presented Labour's views on economics in industry.

There remains one more field which may properly be included among the non-fiction books. I refer to translations of foreign books into the English language. During the past few years interest in foreign books has been steadily growing, and, with that interest, the field for foreign books has widened until to-day many books published in France, Germany and other countries appear in an English edition. The qualifications required of the translator are obvious.

In translation work much depends upon the type of book to be translated. A popular work may be turned into English by a skilled journalist, whereas a technical or political book may need the skilled knowledge and practised hand of the expert. It is a limited field, but nevertheless an important if not especially profitable one for the writer with the necessary qualifications. It must be noted, however, that the free-lance's opportunities are limited by the publishers' practice of employing regular translators. The qualified translator should approach English publishers in the first instance. The usual arrangement is an outright fee paid to the translator by the English publisher.

Another arrangement is for the translator to obtain from the proprietor (author or publisher, as the case may be) the right for a certain period to make arrangements for publication in the English language, it being understood that in that period he would make his translation, any payments resulting therefrom to be divided between the two parties. An alternative plan

is for the translator to buy the rights in the work for an outright sum, but this is highly speculative and not advisable, with rare exceptions, as the purchaser is liable to find himself landed with a book which no one wishes to publish.

The possibilities of syndicating extracts from any of the books surveyed in the foregoing pages should not be overlooked, as the disposal of such rights may add considerably to the amount the author may reasonably expect to receive for his work. The question of syndication, however, is dealt with more fully in a later chapter.

It must be remembered that there are many types of book—both fiction and non-fiction—for which it may be said that it is easier to find a public than a publisher. In the case of non-fiction books a careful study of the requirements of individual publishers will save much waste of time and useless effort. Advertisements and catalogues are readily available and provide a certain index to the varying needs of different publishing firms. From time to time, too, a certain type of book—to take a recent instance, autobiographical war books—will be found to be favoured by one publisher or another, and the qualified author may profitably take advantage of such increased interest in any subject.

## CHAPTER IV

### AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER

AUTHORSHIP as a profession is in the melting pot. Every day we can see the art of literature being more securely harnessed to the chariot of commerce (or should it be the other way round?). The commercialisation of literature has inevitably reacted in curious ways. Authorship has attracted many speculators and adventurers, some inspired, no doubt, by the prospect of publicity, others, more optimistically, in the anticipation of large monetary reward. Authors are not what they were.

To-day there are probably more aspirants to literary fame than ever before. This increase in the number of authors and would-be authors would not be alarming if publishing were the simple straightforward business it was fifty years ago. But to-day the whole business of book publishing has become much more complicated.

In the old days the author wrote his book and took it to the bookseller, who combined the functions of publishing and selling books. For his labour the author usually received a lump sum and the simple transaction was complete. The book was manufactured and had only a comparatively local sale. To-day the commercial side of literature is bristling with complications. Territorial



rights throughout the world, translation rights, dramatic and film rights, serial rights, broadcasting, cheap edition rights—all have to be taken into consideration. A book is a business in itself and since the author is an active partner he should at least know something of the conditions which govern this particular business.

Very few authors understand the commercial side. Some prefer to remain almost entirely ignorant of all business details and concentrate on what they regard as the author's proper function, namely, to write. There is something to be said for this point of view, especially in view of the rise of the literary agent and the establishment of the Society of Authors, which can and do protect the business interests of authors who are prudent enough to take advantage of their expert services.

The author who wants to pursue his creative work without being harassed by mathematics and complicated detail usually employs a literary agent. A later chapter deals fully with the status and functions of the agent.

At the same time it is not an undesirable thing that the author should be able, if he so desires, to make himself acquainted with at least the rudiments of the commercial side, and it is the object of this book to survey the most important aspects from the author's point of view. It is hardly necessary to warn the reader that conditions change so rapidly that no work of this kind, however comprehensive, can hope to cover all the ground. With every year come fresh developments and complications.

The author of a book is, commercially, in a peculiar position. Although Dr. Johnson once declared that no one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money, it is

undeniably true that many authors, 'if not entirely indifferent to the financial return from their books, regard the money they earn (or do not earn) as of relatively little importance. On the other hand, writing is a profession, sometimes even a trade, and the author who is dependent on his literary income, or who is anxious to reap the maximum return from his books, should, and often does, attach great importance to the commercial aspect of book-writing. Between the two types of author stand the publisher and the literary agent. The publisher naturally ensures his profit so far as he can ; he is above all a business man, and when he publishes a book he usually does so in the expectation of making a profit—though not always, as we shall see. The profits from a book are divided between author and publisher, and only the keen competition which exists among publishers and the vigilance of the author's agent prevent some publishers from taking the lion's share. As it is, the author frequently makes more money out of a book than the publisher. The author usually has a draft agreement put in front of him for approval and signature. Nine authors out of ten take a contract on trust and most of them only learn by gradual experience the main features of the business.

This cannot be described as a healthy state of affairs. Let me state at once, lest any author imagines that the object of this book is merely to teach him how to extract more money from publishers and editors, that the true state of affairs will probably surprise him. It is dangerous to jump to conclusions in the literary business.

For instance, the inexperienced author may believe that the publisher grabs all he can and leaves the author

as little as possible. Also, he probably believes that the publisher "takes no risks." He will find that the publisher often gets considerably less than the author out of a book, although he (the publisher) is the capitalist in the partnership. In what other business does the capitalist or financier earn the smaller share? Then again, it is perfectly true that the publisher is sometimes willing to incur a definite loss on a book, if he decides that such a policy will benefit him in the long run. This is not due to any inherent philanthropic instinct in publishers—although it is gratifying, in a materialistic and selfish age, to be able to refer to publishers who are actuated by higher motives than those of financial gain—but, as I have already said, to the extraordinarily keen commercial competition and personal rivalry which exists among publishers.

In spite of the inevitable uncertainties of their business, I repeat that publishers are often content to publish books without any prospect of immediate profit, and sometimes even at a loss. In view of my previous assertion that the publisher is primarily a business man, this may seem paradoxical, but in publishing it is necessary to look some way ahead, and a policy that forgoes immediate profit in the expectation of a bigger reward in the future is not commercially unsound. Few publishers, indeed, can show a profit in a year on the books actually published during that year. The majority make their money out of old books, reprints and cheap editions. But the new books of to-day are the old books of to-morrow, and publishers willingly continue to issue new books and novels in the hope that they may find favour and continue to sell for an indefinite period.

Initially, the author is likely to make more money out of a book than the publisher, and although the author does not earn less per copy sold as sales increase (as royalties are usually on an increasing scale, he almost invariably makes more), the publishers earn relatively very much more after the sales of a book proceed beyond a certain figure. The cost of production—borne by the publisher in nearly every case—eliminates the possibility of the publisher's profit until a certain number of copies has been sold, whereas the author's profit, in the form of a royalty, nearly always begins with the first copy sold.

I stress this point, since many authors are apparently under a grave misapprehension concerning the relative profits of author and publisher.

In the case of a novelist, or an author of a non-fiction book, who is likely to produce further books, the same principle applies in rather a different way. A novelist, in particular, is in a sense a literary "property" and, especially if the contract gives him an option on future books by the same author, the publisher will cheerfully incur a loss on the first book in the hope of recouping himself through the increased sales of subsequent books by that author. It often happens that a publisher, recognising the promise of a hitherto unknown writer, actually loses money on the early books which appear under his imprint, only to have the mortification of seeing a rival publisher reap where he has sown. This is very unfair, although it may be thought that the author is not unreasonable in blaming his first publisher for failing to market his previous books successfully. It is only because authors do not understand and appreciate the initial difficulties that they sometimes desert the man who first

recognised the quality or the promise of their work. It takes time to establish a literary reputation. The author who begins to "sell" with his first or second book is a lucky man indeed. As soon as he has a definite public other publishers will naturally be anxious to bid for his work. An author with a ready-made public is an acquisition to any publisher.

Authors who thus turn their backs on the publishers who "discovered" them are, on the whole, in a minority. Whatever faults writers may have, loyalty is generally one of their virtues. One can point to many distinguished life-time associations between authors and publishers—the classic instance of Byron and John Murray, and in modern days the association of Kipling and Hardy with the Macmillans, of Frank Danby with Hutchinson's, and of W. J. Locke with the Bodley Head.

The writing of books cannot be regarded as only a commercial proposition, although the commercial aspect is naturally of considerable and, nowadays, of increasing importance. The personal relationship between author and publisher is bound to play a part in the transaction. So long as results are mutually satisfactory and personal relations continue to be harmonious, partners are not likely to separate, and it is satisfactory to record the pleasant and profitable association of many notable authors and publishers.

In these increasingly complex times, however, there is considerably more danger of the disappearance of the old personal relationship. Publishing is rapidly becoming more and more commercial. The new complications and ramifications of publishing are undoubtedly responsible for the widening of the gulf between author and

publisher. It may not be possible to bridge it socially and sociably as in the old days, but a clearer understanding of the situation on both sides may well help author and publisher to understand and sympathise with each other's difficulties.

There are, of course, publishers and publishers. There are good publishers and bad ; old-fashioned and ultra-modern ; one man businesses and mass-production establishments. Most of the publishers whose names are familiar to the reading public are sound, honourable people, with reputations to maintain. Their methods may differ, but they are thoroughly reputable. There are publishers of another kind, who do not subscribe to the sound old journalistic tradition that " what is worth printing is worth paying for." Their business methods have nothing in common with the real practice of publishing. Numerically they are negligible, but, as the unwary author may fall into their net, a word of explanation and caution may not be out of place. Briefly, their business is mainly publishing " on commission," as it is termed. That is to say, the author pays for the publication of his book. It would be foolish to pretend that there is any great harm in an " author " gratifying his vanity by paying for the privilege of seeing his work in print between covers. In fact, many well known authors have had to begin their literary careers by paying part, if not the whole, cost of production of their books. Particularly is this true of certain types of books, for which the demand is so limited that even under the most favourable conditions their publication must result in a loss. In these circumstances it is only reasonable that the author who wishes to be published should bear

the burden of the inevitable loss. Many—I should say the majority nowadays—of the volumes of verse published are financed wholly or in part by their authors. “Juveniles”—books for children—often fail to find a publisher unless the author is prepared to contribute towards the cost of production.

The danger is, however, that the publisher who makes the publication of books on commission his sole business is apt to regard a manuscript, not from the standpoint of its literary merit, but from the prospective profit to himself out of the money which the author may be willing to pay. Needless to say, he takes care to make his own profit out of the transaction, and the “estimates” of the cost of printing an edition of the book are naturally framed to include that figure. This criticism does not of course apply to every publisher who publishes books on commission. Many of our most important publishers occasionally issue a book this way, when circumstances justify it; and their figures may be accepted without hesitation.

It is foolish vanity, perhaps, to publish a book at one's own expense, unless it has merit, and only practical considerations have prevented reputable publishers from accepting it; but the firms that trade on human nature in this fashion do not deserve the honourable title of “publisher.” It is hardly necessary to make further comment.

There is a good deal to be said in favour of the old-fashioned type of publishing house. They have tradition behind them, and tradition counts in the publishing world. Booksellers are a conservative race, and the publisher of long and honourable standing, who has the reputation of

not publishing books lightly, holds a high place in the estimation of "the trade." As a bookseller recently remarked to me, "So-and-so's don't publish many books, but, when they do, you may be sure they're worth looking at. No sausage-machine stuff here, sir!" The imprint of the older school of publisher, naturally, is more appropriate to some books than others. Dignity and impudence may mix well in an oil-painting but are sure to come to grief in the publishing business.

It is commonly supposed (generally by their contemptuous go-ahead young rivals) that the old-established publishing firms cannot and do not keep pace with the times and, as a result, cannot sell their books. This is, I think, a mistaken view. It does not follow that tradition and dignity are incompatible with salesmanship. In some respects—notably in advertising—the older houses may not be so enterprising as the younger generation, but the tendency to regard everything with Victorian or even Edwardian origins as a "back number" is an error of judgment.

"It is idle to deny," as Mr. W. B. Maxwell has said, "that even in this world of chaos and lost traditions the imprint of certain really good publishers has a prestige, if it does not quite bestow a cachet. The first question a reader asks of an author is, 'Who is your publisher?' and if one is able to reply 'So-and-so' or 'Such-and-such,' it has the same comforting sound as when one says one is a member of a still venerable and select club."

The new school of publishers is an interesting phenomenon. Their policy is frankly commercial. Modern methods of salesmanship and advertising, and a preference for quantity rather than quality, have taken the field.



They are out to sell books—a worthy and laudable ambition, let it be said—and the margin of profit on their turnover is more important to them than the literary quality of their authors' work. If there is any prospect of developing an author into a commercial success, that is their primary concern. Let us be honest with ourselves and admit that many authors share the same point of view. Not perhaps for the same reasons, since to an author bigger sales mean wider appreciation—a factor which the author, if he be human, is bound to take into consideration. The publisher who advertises extensively makes a strong appeal to a large number of authors, and their names will often be found in his list on this account. An author chooses his publisher (when he is in a position to do so) for various reasons: (1), the terms the publisher is prepared to pay; (2), his commercial activity, viz., organisation and sales machinery; (3), advertising as distinct from salesmanship, although it is a contributory factor; (4), the quality of the publisher's book production (a more important point this than some publishers realise); and (5), last but not least, the publisher's courtesy towards his authors.

The wise publisher is he who realises that the average author is not a business man. Authors are temperamental, sometimes to the point of eccentricity, and many a valuable author has been lost to a publisher who failed to be human, as well as businesslike—a difficult but not impossible combination—in his dealings with the said author.

The actual contract is not nearly so important as many authors believe. To my mind it represents, roughly, about 40 per cent in the case of the averagely successful

book. (As soon as a book progresses beyond the ordinarily successful stage the terms of the contract naturally become more and more significant.) Infinitely more important than the amount of the advance and the actual figure of the royalty is the ability of the publisher to sell books. Few authors realise this. To put it in a nutshell, it is better policy for an author to take a £50 advance and a ten per cent royalty from the publisher who can sell, say, three thousand copies of his novel, than to accept £100 and a 15 per cent royalty from a publisher whose limited organisation will sell only 1,500 copies.

Many authors prefer certain publishers to others on account of the better quality of their book production. One result of the great increase in the number of books published has been, in certain instances, a deplorable lowering of the standard of production. In recent years, however, there has been an appreciable improvement in the quality of book production. As a rule, it is only the publisher who produces a limited number of books who can make a really good book. Careful production takes time.

In this survey of publishers we are necessarily putting the commencing author out of court for the time being, and considering the publisher from the angle of the author whose public is more or less established. Such authors are, up to a point, in a position to choose their publishers; but the considerations which influence their decision naturally have some interest for authors still unknown.

At a certain stage in his career the average author finds himself confronted with this problem: should he remain with his original publisher? The loyalty of

authors to their original publishers has already been touched upon. The author who remains with the same publisher benefits in a practical way. The booksellers, who are a very conservative body, always know from whom to order that author's books, and there is no doubt that the continuance of an author's name under the same publisher's imprint gives a favourable impression to "the trade." The author who goes from one publisher to another is, on the other hand, regarded with disfavour; there is always the underlying suspicion that the publisher has been only too glad to let the author go.

The publisher, too, can afford to advertise that author and his books steadily and thoroughly, for he is improving his own property. He can also afford to bring out cheap editions of the author's earlier books and keep them in print. In short, he can, and does, "push" his permanent authors. It is worth his while. But authors and publishers are, in the nature of things, liable to come to a parting of the ways. Actual quarrels are, happily, of rare occurrence. But, as Mr. W. B. Maxwell says: "Authors leave publishers for many reasons, just as wives leave husbands. They leave because they think they are not being properly treated—that somebody else is being preferred to them—that in such an atmosphere they will never get an adequate chance of full self-expression. Sometimes they change their publishers merely from what may be described as night fears. They believe, quite baselessly, that the publisher has sold three large editions and accounted for only two meagre ones, that he did not 'remainder' that masterpiece, but disposed of it at the ordinary price. They leave because, staring them in the face, there is the obvious fact that

a new book to a publisher is a very small affair, while to them it is a very big one, since they are only going to write twenty more books and the publisher is going to publish ten thousand. They leave because their publisher is well satisfied with the modest measure of success they have obtained, while they are profoundly dissatisfied. They leave because of the sickness of hope deferred. They leave because other publishers are persistently beckoning and luring—not because, as the deserted publisher always thinks, a purse was rattled before their greedy eyes, but because a confident promise of improvement was given. They leave publishers in a large way of business because they are at last persuaded that their books get no proper show in an overcrowded list; they leave small firms because they have come to the conclusion that only the big capital, wide organisation and up-to-date management of a great concern can do them any good.”

Is a big firm preferable to a small publisher? The question raises some interesting issues. The small publisher, it is true, can, and often does, devote more time and attention to the comparatively few books and authors on his list than his bigger rival can afford. In some respects publishing is still a personal business. The old author-and-publisher relationship, although fast disappearing as a result of new conditions, still survives, and to many authors this sympathetic contact is an important consideration. An author likes to feel that the publisher takes a keen personal interest in his work. He naturally doesn't like his precious books, the children of his brain, to be treated merely as merchandise and the subject only of profit and loss accounts. There is also another

important consideration. The author who has earned a reputation often prefers to head the smaller publisher's list rather than to be one of many authors with equally considerable reputations in the list of the bigger publishers. It would not be fair to claim for the small publisher the facilities which his larger scale competitor can often obtain, but for prestige and efficiency he is at no disadvantage. There is thus a great deal to be said in favour of the small publisher.

On the other hand, big firms of publishers offer certain advantages. First, their imprint often carries more weight with the bookseller than the quality of the book may deserve; for the bookseller is aware that the publisher can afford to advertise the book more generously and thus stimulate, if not actually create, a demand. This policy of spending money on pushing a book, sometimes out of all proportion to its immediate returns, also reacts to an extent on reviewers, with the result that the author gets additional publicity. In the hands of a big publisher an author knows, if his book is fortunate enough to show signs of developing into a "best-seller," that the publisher will readily spend large sums of money on additional advertising appropriations, trade letters and circulars, and that the whole weight of his selling organisation will be thrown into the scale on his book's behalf. His relations with the publisher may be, and usually are, less intimate, but there are many practical advantages.

"Publishing is work of infinite variety," said a writer recently in *Constable's Monthly List*, the clever house organ of the firm of Constable & Co., Ltd. "It is a life of personal contacts, continual adjustment of circumstance to temperament, and, above all, of endless varying

detail. No two books are identical, any more than are their authors. It is not enough to contract for six biographies, six books of travel, and two dozen novels, and, having decided on a style in which each genre shall be produced, to put them on the market with mechanical efficiency. Efficiency in publishing is like efficiency in motherhood. It must have the business qualities of punctuality and knowledge and orderly control; but it must also have sympathy and a quick sense of the individuality of each growing child. You will ask, then, whether the ideal publisher exists. Probably not. But an author who can gauge his man will, if he has a sense of what a publisher should do, know how much reasonably to expect. From the publisher, who is also an educated being and of himself congenial, he will get advice that may not only make his book more saleable, but even improve it as a book. Mutual dealings will be pleasant, and the author's stringencies will find a generous friend when most they need it. Yet on occasions the literary publisher may seem unduly diffident in exploitation of the market, or unskilful (whether from lack of capital or enterprise) in large-scale operations. The competent commercialist, on the other hand, will give an author accurate and rapid service in matters technical, but the next moment wound his susceptibilities by vulgar boasting, or in some other point of mutual dealing act with obtuseness, lack of courtesy, or sudden jarring parsimony. In default, therefore, of perfection, writers should perhaps decide which failing in a publisher they are most prepared to tolerate—and choose accordingly."

Among authors and publishers the significance of different publishers' imprints is obvious. The mere

name of a publisher conveys to anyone with professional associations the whole of his reputation and current activities. But it is important to remember that the imprint rarely conveys any meaning to the public.

It is a difficult as well as a delicate matter to try to convince a publisher that to the average reader all books look alike, that the title and the author's name are practically all that matter. They don't believe it ; on the contrary, they rather pathetically invest the individual imprint with a degree of importance which, facts being facts, unfortunately is at present far from being justified.

Present day advertising, however, undoubtedly reveals the degree of importance which most publishers attach to their own imprints. Everywhere it is So-and-so's books, So-and-so being printed in type so large and prominent that authors' names and titles seem to follow discreetly and modestly as an afterthought ; particularly is this true of English publishers ; a more keenly developed sense of salesmanship probably restrains his American confrère.

At first sight the tendency seems on all fours with the notion of inflated self-importance which inspires (if so dignified a word may be applied to it) theatrical managements to print their own names in type not less than, say, three times the size of the type allotted to that of the mere author. This, however, is doing considerable injustice to the publisher, who, to give him his due, is generally an intelligent and educated man. When he emphasises his own imprint he does so for various reasons.

In the first place, his most important customers are the booksellers, and his imprint is of obvious significance to the bookseller. Apart from the practical purpose of

informing the trade that he publishes certain books and certain authors, he realises the importance of impressing the bookseller. To this extent imprint advertising is completely justifiable. Experience soon convinces the most retiring of publishers that modesty is unprofitable in "trade" announcements.

When it is a question of general press advertising, however, the same hidebound tendency reveals itself. I use the word "hidebound" advisedly, since the too lavish use of the imprint is so often merely imitative. Jones doesn't like to be outdone by Robinson; and Brown goes one better by using 48-point type instead of the other's 36-point. This may be natural vanity but—under present conditions—it seems a waste of valuable space.

I am convinced that, were it possible to take a referendum on the point, at least ninety per cent. of what we call the reading public would not only deny that they were influenced to any extent by the publisher's imprint, but that they would be utterly unable to say off-hand who published any of the last half-dozen books they had read.

For this state of affairs the publishers have chiefly the uniformity of book production to thank. One book, to the lay eye, looks very much like another. Apart from special gift books, a book has to be exceptionally well produced to evoke even mild praise from the reader. If it does happen to stir his favourable comment, your average reader pauses a moment to look critically at the binding, imposition or paper, or whatever it may be that pleases his fancy, to think, or even to murmur, "Why, this is a nice-looking book." But even then he may not take the trouble to look at the publisher's imprint. On the other hand, if a book is so badly manufactured that



the binding comes unstuck in his hands, or the pagination is wrong, or the leaves fall out, only in such extremes will he vent his verbal wrath on the man that made such a shoddy book. And even then he may not take the trouble to look at the publisher's imprint.

Even should he do so, I doubt if the name would register any permanent impression on his mind. I must repeat that it is hard for those who are actively concerned in book-making to realise that we are, like all experts, in a small minority; we make a mental trinity of title, author, and publisher, but to the reader who walks into a bookseller's shop there is always a missing link in that trinity. There are, of course, a discriminating few in addition to those professionally interested; but when you add together the numbers of those who to any degree are influenced by publishers' imprints, you have but a negligible percentage of readers of books. The fact is that the great reading public is indifferent—thanks, as I have said, to the uniform standard of production and price—to the name of the man who manufactured the book.

Yet the man who manufactured the book is also the man who chose that book for publication. And that brings us to a point very important in consideration of this question of imprints. When a magazine becomes favourably known and increases its circulation no one will deny that its success is due in large measure to its governing editorial policy. The consistent selection of good stories—good in the sense that they are enjoyed by that section of the public for which the magazine is intended—brings highly satisfactory results. Our fortunate magazine acquires a reputation, and benefits accordingly.

Why, then, since the publisher's imprint corresponds to the magazine title, should not a publishing firm prosper on similar lines? There are many reasons: first, books in themselves provide practically no scope for originality—a variation in the colour and design of the binding, a striking wrapper maybe, or a particularly happy title; and, secondly, the astonishing variations of taste which inevitably exist in the selection of books make it impossible to reduce them to a defined standard, high or low. The trouble is that you can't—with one or two exceptions—locate a book public. The exceptions include, without doubt, two types of fiction which are assured of a certain measure of popularity—detective and mystery novels. Any publisher featuring this type of novel would, by steadily associating his imprint with good mystery or detective stories, *in time* create a distinct demand for books bearing his name. But he would have to publish these stories exclusively and to preserve a high standard of quality. With novels of general interest, and serious books too, where the author is comparatively unknown, every publisher knows that he is, up to a point, taking a gamble. You can't tell a "good" book beforehand in the same way that you can tell a good magazine story.

But these are minor reasons. The fundamental reason—and one which I think goes to the root of the whole matter—is that the publisher expects the public to run before they can walk. Before the public can discriminate between one publisher's books and another's—and it is difficult enough in these days when publisher's lists, like the dear old curate's egg, answer to the description of being good in parts—it is necessary to educate the public up to buying and reading more books.

It has been found difficult to induce English publishers to combine with the object of creating, by co-operative advertising, an increased demand for books as books. One or two bold pioneers have been trying to persuade the publisher that it is to his ultimate advantage to inculcate the book-reading habit. It is satisfactory to record that a beginning has been made,\* but more might still be done. As yet, the English publisher resigns himself to a pitifully limited public. It is, I readily admit, difficult to sell books by advertising under present conditions: but, to nine English publishers out of ten, attractive advertising is rank heresy; and as for a national co-operative advertising campaign in favour of books—sheer waste of money!

The case for the imprint is admirably put by Mr. Alec Waugh, when he says:

Books are not, after all, chosen at haphazard. They are chosen because they appeal to some facet or other of the temperament of the men responsible for their selection; and in time, spread over a number of years, it may be seen that the list of a firm's publications does present an expression of the composite personality of the board that manages that firm's interests. In time, consequently, one does come to recognise the imprint of a particular firm as the guarantee of a particular type of quality. There are, of course, a great many books that would be equally suitable to a great many lists; but the general reader of acute perceptions comes unquestionably in the long run to turn instinctively to the output of a particular publishing house. If a reader can pick up a book by a new writer, or a writer who is unknown to him, and can from the name of the publisher obtain some indication of the type of book that is in his hands, then that publishing house can claim to possess personality. The author's name on a book corresponds to a label on a wine bottle: it is a

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\* In this connection the National Book Council's valuable work should be acknowledged.

statement of the contents. So should, in its much wider sense, be a publisher's name at the foot of it. We hear often enough someone say, "Oh, that's by So-and-so ; it's certain to be good." It is the publisher's hope that one day he will hear someone say, "Oh, that's published by So-and-so ; it ought to be all right."

But, wide as is Mr. Waugh's experience in writing and publishing books, I quarrel with him over "the general reader of acute perceptions." To my mind, if he is not actually a contradiction in terms, in point of numbers he is so negligible that, to put it mildly, publishers pay him extravagant homage when they so regularly flourish their imprint in their announcements, and, as in the case of Mr. Waugh, are perhaps over-optimistic in their hopes that the firm's imprint will even in time attract the discerning reader.

Amid the vast and ever-increasing deluge of new books there is, for the general reader, only time for relatively few books ; and, in the nature of things, the books of his choice cover many and various imprints. How, then, is he to gauge the value of any individual imprint ? Indeed, by the time his palate has registered the quality of an imprint, it will probably have become insensitive through sheer old age—and by then the irony of the situation will almost certainly be that someone else has slipped into the publisher's shoes, with a consequent change of policy !

Books are not proprietary articles, and never will be. The imprint may influence reviewers and an intelligent minority of the reading public ; it certainly attracts authors to the publisher and is of practical importance to the bookseller, but it is a meaningless symbol to the vast

majority. If publishers were to reduce their imprint advertising to 10- or 12-point type at the foot of their advertisements and devote the resulting saving in expenditure to a co-operative campaign to sell more books—as books—they would benefit enormously. Perhaps not this year, nor next ; but who is in business for just a year or two ?

The imprint is, I am afraid, a fetish which common-sense can hardly hope to kill. Publishers are notoriously conservative. But, as a final plea for its relegation to just proportions, it must be pointed out that the imprint is really only a survival from the early days when the publisher was both publisher and bookseller. In the old days the imprint told the reader where to go and buy the book. To-day, with the bookseller at his service, the reader neither expects nor requires such illogical and loud-voiced direction.

## CHAPTER V

### APPROACHING PUBLISHERS

ANY publisher of experience will tell you that the ways of authors are weird and wonderful. So much astonishing ignorance prevails as to the procedure in approaching publishers that much of this chapter must necessarily be of an elementary nature. Authors, even the best of them, are so liable to error in this vital branch of their business that even the simplest advice and cautions are necessary.

Some authors seem utterly unable to recognise that the publisher is, first and foremost, a man of business. As such, his office must be conducted on business lines. Yet there have been many instances of authors who have taken their precious manuscript under their arms and set out to interview the publisher whom they deemed worthy the privilege of publishing it. When, naturally, the author is received by someone in the outer office with the polite request that the MS. be left for consideration, the outraged author has been known to take his MS. and his departure promptly and indignantly. It never seems to dawn on these impossible people that the publisher can't spare time personally to interview every stray caller. Of course, it is just possible that by so delegating the

interview to an underling and thus wounding the author's feelings, once in a while he allows a budding genius or "best-seller" to go to a rival publisher. But, I think, not often.

One occasion in my earliest literary days I shall always remember. A certain author of some little distinction—I think he had then three or four moderately successful novels to his credit—called at the office of one of the leading publishers, and it devolved upon me to see him. At that time I happened to be acting as a sort of junior literary editor, as well as being assistant editor of one of the firm's weekly publications, their publicity manager, and various other odd things. The well-known author [*sic*], for this is how he introduced himself (I had read his books but could think of no comment which would have greased the wheels of the interview), looked me up and down disparagingly, and said, "I take it you have no sort of—er—authority?" Impossible to reproduce the intonation. I replied, "Oh, no, I'm merely a glorified office-boy." To my astonishment, he said, perfectly seriously, "I don't waste my time on office boys," and out he went. It was a severe blow to my pride, but I am sure his departure saved the office a great deal of subsequent bother.

According to tradition, Byron declared that Barabbas was a publisher. (Mr. John Murray, I believe, officially gave the lie to the statement that Byron altered the Biblical words and sent the mutilated Bible to the original John Murray.) At any rate, a considerable section of authors seem to believe that the publisher is inherently a rogue and is out to defraud the innocent author. Of course there are publishers and publishers; but I doubt

whether a more honourable body of business men could be found anywhere. I have always found it difficult to convince a certain type of author that the publisher is genuinely anxious to find good books and publish them, and that that anxiety is so keen that he will willingly assign to the author a generous share of the potential profits in order to have the privilege of publishing his book. In addition, publishers will take unlimited trouble and often incur considerable expense in trying to find the MSS. they want.

I wonder whether authors realise the relatively important cost of reading MSS. which every reputable publisher incurs? Thousands of MSS. are submitted every year to every publisher of note, and every one of these has to be examined. It is true that the obviously unsuitable ones are weeded out in very quick time and duly returned to their authors; but what of the likely MSS.<sup>2</sup> Each of these has to have a more or less careful reading; many of them have to be read by two or three different people. In one important publishing house every novel of promise is invariably read by three separate readers and three reports are submitted to the Fiction Editor. All this costs money, in the form of valuable time and otherwise. In the case of MSS. of special or technical interest, it is often necessary for the publisher to obtain an expert opinion from an outside authority for which he may have to pay a fee of two or three guineas.

It would be quite logical for the publisher to charge a nominal reading fee when unsolicited MSS. are submitted to him, but, fortunately, the competition for acceptable books is so keen that publishers cheerfully undertake to sacrifice time, money and labour in their search for good



material. It is, as a matter of fact, doubly fortunate for the author that publishers are willing to read their MSS. for nothing, for any attempt to institute even a nominal reading fee would inevitably bring undesirable "publishers" into the field, whose sole concern would undoubtedly be to take as many fees as possible from as many authors as possible.

I do not pretend that the present-day publisher is a philanthropist who ought to receive the grateful thanks of authors; he is, as I have said, primarily a business man. He badly wants good MSS. and is prepared to go to a lot of trouble to find them. I do think, however, that many authors lose sight of this aspect of the literary business, and, if they took the trouble to realise it, would be more ready to appreciate the publisher's difficulties.

So often one hears of authors writing resentfully to complain that their MS. has received no attention, it being a month ago since it was delivered, and so on. Delay is bound to occur, even in the best regulated establishments. MSS., like other things, have a way of pouring in thick and fast at certain times; readers are sometimes ill, or away. Instances where real discourtesy has been shown to authors are so rare that one can only congratulate publishers on their forbearance in dealing with impatient writers.

There is, of course, a good deal of allowance to be made for the natural anxiety of the author, but while the majority of publishers deal with the work of even unknown writers as expeditiously as they can, I cannot help feeling that most young authors do not know the exact position.

To begin at the beginning, then, it is obviously bad

policy to waste the publisher's time. A manuscript can quite safely be sent to the publisher by post, preferably registered. It is customary, as well as equitable, to enclose stamps of an equivalent value to enable the publisher to return the manuscript if unacceptable. Reasonably enough, in these days when postage is a serious consideration, many publishers will not undertake to return MSS. unless the cost of dispatch has been defrayed in advance by the author.

Manuscripts should be clearly typed on plain paper, preferably of quarto size, *i.e.*, 11 in. by 8 in. The paper should be white, not too thin, not too thick. Only one side of the paper should be used. This may seem very elementary advice, but if an annual pile could be made of manuscripts which do not conform to these simple requirements I am sure it would overshadow St. Paul's. The average publisher's daily post-bag reveals the most extraordinary productions. Manuscripts on blue paper, yellow paper, green, pink, mauve, and all the colours of the rainbow; and of sizes equally assorted. Many are tied up with variously coloured ribbons; some I have known must have been saturated in perfume; a large proportion are illegible or worn out even when typed; and an even greater proportion are handwritten. Can authors' optimism go further?

To the harassed publisher's reader a manuscript is just a manuscript. He doesn't want to be distracted by its unconventional appearance nor does he welcome the curious devices which some authors appear to imagine will ensure preferential or more sympathetic consideration for their efforts. Such tricks only serve to irritate.

The author's name and address should be clearly

typed or written on the title page or the outside cover of the MS.—preferably on both. If a *nom de plume* is used, the author's real name should be put in brackets after it.

One author (who ought to know better, as she has published several books) recently addressed the manuscript of her new novel to "The Literary Editor" of a certain publishing firm, and enclosed for his acceptance a signed photograph, not innocent of perfume, of herself. If she could have witnessed the reception of her unsolicited gift by the literary editor in question, who happens to be a lady, she might have repented of her inspiration.

The manuscript, then, should be a plain affair. Above all, it should be absolutely legible. Nothing is more annoying than a manuscript which is difficult to read. Although handwritten MSS. have been known to pass muster, I strongly recommend all authors to have their work typed. The difference in cost between good and bad typing is relatively so small that it is just as well to make a good job of it. The point is worth mentioning because inferior typewriting can be just as awkward to read as handwriting.

Convenient margins are a necessity. Many authors overlook this point. On the left hand side of the page a fairly wide margin should be allowed for, with an equally liberal margin at the top. Professional typists usually observe these points, but authors who type their own work are apt to overlook details of this kind.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced, that is to say a line of type should be separated from the following line by a line of white space. Single spacing is undesirable; after a time it is a strain on the reader's eyes. Some

writers prefer triple-spaced typing, i.e., two lines left blank between the lines of type, and that is certainly preferable to single-spacing.

Should manuscripts be bound between covers? This is a question frequently asked. Some form of binding is, I think, desirable. It prevents the pages from becoming scattered and lost, and, if done carefully, does assist the reader. If, however, the manuscript is so bulky that its weight is not negligible it should certainly not be bound up, as the unfortunate reader may have to bear its weight when reading it, or carry it about. In such cases the manuscript may conveniently be bound in two parts. The binding should not, however, be permanent. When (as is presumably the author's hope) his work is put into the printer's hands it is customary for the "copy" to be divided up among several compositors, who set up different parts of the book in type simultaneously.

The most practicable and convenient form of binding is the fairly stout but not too heavy "instantaneous" cover which holds all the loose pages firmly until the outside covers are flattened open so far that the contents are released. It is thus possible to add or remove pages as may be required, and enables the reader to separate the MS. if desired. When it eventually finds its way to the printer the cover is easily removed, and in his view the MS. is ideal "copy," ready to his hand.

Pages should be clearly folioed, or numbered, throughout. Chapters should not be self-contained in this respect. If, in revision, certain pages have had to be omitted, it is not necessary to refolio the remainder. If, for instance, pages 102 to 107 have been deleted it is quite enough to number page 101 like this, "101--107." This is a clear

indication to both publisher and printer. Similarly, if pages have been added, the recognised device is to number the additional pages 57a, 57b, 57c, and so on, according to the number of the page they follow.

In addition to the practical assistance thus given to the reader, and more especially the printer, these minor points are well worth attention, since their careful observance plainly shows any publisher at a glance that you know the ropes and that you are anxious to avoid making things difficult for him. Some authors profess to be superior to such little points of detail, and it is true that they are, after all, only a minor matter, but if they knew as well as I do how much experienced readers appreciate the author's co-operation in simplifying their task, they would pay them much more attention.

The procedure in reading manuscripts varies considerably among publishing houses. Consequently one publisher will be able to give a speedier decision than another. Some firms are noted for the rapidity of their decisions; others are equally notorious for their delay. No useful object would be served by giving their names. If the author has an agent he will almost certainly be able to estimate, from actual experience, how long any given publisher is likely to take in coming to a decision about a book. The point is, however, comparatively unimportant. The first lesson the commencing author has to learn is that of patience. There is, nevertheless, a limit, and the author whose manuscript (provided it is not of special or technical interest) has been under consideration by a firm of publishers for longer than, say, six weeks, is certainly justified in sending them a polite reminder. If that becomes necessary he should make a careful point

of notifying them of the title and nature of the MS., and the date it was submitted. If it was sent from a different address or under a *nom de plume* those details should be briefly given. It is useless writing to a publisher and omitting to give him your *nom de plume*, because his office may be so regulated that MSS. are registered under "Author's names," in which case your manuscript is probably not card-indexed under your own name.

When writing to publishers, above all be brief and to the point. A letter of some kind should accompany the MS., but only to state formally—and *briefly*—that you herewith submit your MS. (give title, nature of the book, *e.g.*, whether a novel or a travel book) and that you await his decision, and are his faithfully. The publisher doesn't want the history of the book, nor a recital of the motives that prompted you to write it. It is of no advantage to state proudly that it is your "first attempt at literary work of any kind" (I quote from a typical letter.)

Of course, if circumstances are exceptional, it may be necessary to give the publisher some details. But there is nothing exceptional in writing a book—ask any publisher!—and unless explanations are absolutely essential, it is generally unwise to make your preliminary letter more than a merely formal one.

I have often been asked whether it is advisable to approach a publisher before actually sending him a manuscript, to ascertain whether he is likely to be interested in a work of that kind. Here again, if the book is of an exceptional nature, or if its importance justifies the author doing so, it is a sound plan. But to write to a publisher who issues many novels a week, and say, "I have just completed a novel of about 80,000 words which

I should like to submit for your consideration. Will you kindly let me know whether you would like me to send it to you ? " is simply foolish.

It is not a good plan to write and ask publishers why they have rejected your MS., and it is equally unreasonable to ask for any criticism of your work. Not that publishers invariably send MSS. back to their authors with a politely formal note of rejection ; many publishers take the trouble to send a courteous, sometimes an encouraging, letter to an author when they feel that it is justified by the promising quality of the manuscript.

If a publisher invites you to go and see him and, let us say, suggests some alterations in your book, don't—if you decide to carry them out—live on his doorstep for weeks afterwards. Publishers are busy people and don't want to be bothered unnecessarily.

Common sense is about the least common thing in the world, and authors seem to have even less than other people. Whether it is due to egotism, absorption in their own work, or to unbusinesslike habits, or whether it is considered so foreign to the " artistic temperament " which so many writers consider a desirable part of their mental equipment, I do not know, but a brief experience of authors and their ways compels me to offer the foregoing elementary cautions.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LITERARY AGENT

THE literary agent is the most significant indication of the new relations between author and publisher. Publishing a book is a complicated business compared with the procedure of fifty years ago. Nowadays a book is a business in itself. Only a specialist can hope to understand all the ramifications of the business. With the complication of contracts, due to the growth in importance of outside rights in literary property, and the keen competition among publishers, only an expert can manipulate the one and take advantage of the other.

In bygone days the cordial relationship which existed between author and publisher was founded on the simplicity of their business dealings. Experience has clearly shown that when bargaining has to be done those friendly relations are jeopardised. The best of friends are liable to come to grief over business.

The agent has sometimes been described as the fifth wheel on the literary coach. He has been accused of destroying the harmonious relationship between author and publisher, but in some respects the exact opposite is nearer the truth. The author without an agent is at a disadvantage in fixing terms with his publisher, unless



he is satisfied to leave everything to the publisher's discretion, and that is obviously a doubtful practice. The author whose business interests are represented by an agent is enabled, on the other hand, to maintain his friendship with the publisher, to the satisfaction of all parties, including even the agent himself. Indeed, I know authors who leave things entirely to their agents, congratulate them warmly when an improvement in terms is secured, then call on their publishers and mildly deprecate the rapacity of their agents, knowing they can afford to be magnanimous—after the contract is signed.

It is, on the whole, a very satisfactory working arrangement. The author certainly benefits; the agent's services are adequately rewarded; and the publisher appreciates the advantage of dealing with a man who understands the business and can come straight to the point. Moreover, the modern publisher realises that, although he may thereby have to pay the author more, the agent is, or can be, as valuable to him as to the author. Publishers now realise that the development of literary agency was inevitable. It may seem putting the cart before the horse to consider first the value of the agent to the publisher, rather than to the author, but a brief examination of the present position will best explain the enhanced prestige and importance of the literary agent.

In the first place, many publishers who tried to deal with all their authors personally, in the old-fashioned way, would have to restrict their business considerably. The agentless author would scarcely know where he stood with all the different rights in his book and would naturally and frequently come to his publisher to find out. The

agent is on the author's side of the fence, and should be able to explain complications satisfactorily. In the old days the author went to see his publisher if any question arose in connection with his books; to-day he goes to see his agent.

Secondly, the agent saves the publisher a great deal of time and labour by sifting the wheat from the chaff among manuscripts beforehand. The eternal bane of publishers' lives is the vast quantity of impossible manuscripts which are submitted to them daily. To some extent the agent alleviates this burden. When a MS. arrives in his office, bearing the imprint of a well-known agent, the publisher knows that it has already passed the agent's often severe test of eligibility. But the agent's name on a manuscript is not necessarily any guarantee that it will appeal to every publisher. Tastes differ so profoundly that it is not surprising for an agent to enthuse over a manuscript which makes little or no appeal to publishers. It is important to remember that there are very few agents who really count, and it is only their labels which make a favourable impression.

Indeed, the imprint of a second-rate agent is of no value to the author whatever, since the publisher probably knows from experience that that particular agent's judgment is not to be trusted. Most of the authors whose names are known to the public are represented by the few first-class literary agents whose names do carry some weight.

It is a well known fact that nearly every novelist of note is to-day represented by an agent. The value of the agent's services to the author is so obvious that at this stage it may surely be taken on trust. Now the publisher's

profits depend directly on authors ; and if he wants new authors in his list—and what publisher does not ?—he values the goodwill of the few agents who count, and who can sell him the books he wants.

The status of the literary agent has improved enormously as a result of modern developments in the book world, and the valuable work—valuable to publishers as well as to authors—in the past of the pioneers of reputable literary agency. To-day, the influential agent is an important figure in the literary world.

There are, of course, bad agents as well as good ; in fact the number of useless and actually harmful agents is, as one might expect, considerably greater than the number of worth-while agents. There are only about half-a-dozen agents with a reputation. The remainder eke out a living by exploiting the ignorant author in a variety of ways.

The reputable agents, who do not advertise, are known to all authors of experience, to all publishers, and to nearly all editors, and the author who is in any doubt as to the prestige of an agent should make enquiries from someone of this kind.

The agent usually works on a commission basis, generally ten per cent. of all monies received by him on behalf of the author.

This is the only fee charged by the reputable agent and covers the negotiation of the MS., the settlement of terms, the preparation of the contract and the collection of monies due to the author.

Those agents who charge " reading fees " are to be avoided, since, whatever they may say to the contrary, all are fish that come to their net ; whereas the honourable

agent cannot afford to handle MSS. for which he does not honestly see a prospective market. The agent who works on a payment by results basis is obviously unlikely to negotiate a manuscript unless he believes he can place it, for, if he does not succeed in selling the MS., he positively loses money, in the form of time, labour, postage expenses and so forth, by handling it, since he receives nothing from the author.

Unfortunately, writers are so lamentably ignorant of the ways of the literary world that a large number of unscrupulous agents are able to make money out of them. By carefully-worded advertisements they induce the unwary young author to submit his MSS. They charge a "nominal" reading fee; they diplomatically suggest that his MSS. should be re-typed (by themselves); they offer to criticise or revise the MSS. In plain English, their first consideration is not to make money for, but out of, the author. I do not suggest that because an agent charges reading fees he is necessarily dishonourable—in fact to charge a reading fee is logical enough; nor do I deny that the assistance of an expert in revising or criticising MSS. is a valuable service and as such is entitled to be paid for. But, human nature being what it is, there is no doubt that many unscrupulous individuals continue to exploit the inexperienced writer.

The reputable agent is often as hard to satisfy as the publisher himself. Since the prosperity of his business depends on results, he is naturally not prepared to handle more than that proportion of the manuscripts submitted to him which appears likely to yield results. Consequently it does not follow that the agent will undertake to handle any MS. It has to be read before judgment

can be pronounced on it, and if the agent can see no market for it, it must perforce be returned to the author. In one important literary agency known to the writer the average of rejected MSS. is over 85 per cent, that is to say, less than fifteen manuscripts out of every hundred submitted are retained for negotiation.

The value of the agent to the author has been triumphantly demonstrated by experience, but its exact nature is not always clearly understood. Let us consider the main advantages to the author of employing an agent.

First, there are so many potential new markets that the author can only hope to reach them by enlisting the services of an expert. It needs a specialist to cover all the ground. Few writers even know what these markets are and what is their relative importance, but it is the literary agent's business. He is in daily touch with the ever-changing markets for the author's work. Even in the comparatively straightforward task of disposing of certain rights only, *e.g.*, the volume rights in the English language for the British Empire, the agent knows what publishers are likely to be interested. He is, as a rule, in close personal touch with publishers and knows what kind of books they want, as well as what they do not want, and when they want them, and what terms they are likely to pay. Many publishers make a point of informing the leading agents from time to time of their particular requirements. The situation is constantly changing. The book a publisher may not want in January he will eagerly buy in September. If an author were to try to keep in close touch with his markets and thus dispense with the agent he would find he had no time left to write any books at all. There are, it is true, a number of authors who are

in frequent and personal contact with publishers and editors, and to them the agent may seem less useful than to the ordinary author. But it is not so.

The author who lunches and dines with publishers and editors is apt to think he is saving a ten per cent agent's commission by doing his business direct, and, as he thinks, probably with as much, if not more, benefit to himself. But what a short-sighted policy this is! What of all the other markets for his work, the full benefit of which—as they subsequently find to their sorrow—authors are thereby so often deprived of? Film rights, translation rights, different territorial rights throughout the world, broadcasting rights—all these potentially valuable properties may be lost or depreciated as a result of a contract between author and publisher direct. Not that the publisher is the wicked spider who entices the unwary author into his web; the publishers themselves cannot always cope with the ramifications of the commercial side of literature to-day. This is proved by the large number of publishers who engage an international literary agent to represent *their* interests in the various rights they may have acquired outside their province.

The average writer is naturally disinclined to attend to the business side of his work. The agent, in addition to relieving him of the burden of business details, often contributes to his success as an author by protecting him from the harassing experience of continual rejections. The author's temperament is an important factor, and many an author who has eventually made good could not have worked so cheerfully and optimistically in the earlier stages of his career had it not been for careful nursing at the hands of his agent. The wise agent is more than a

business representative ; he is, or should be, as it were, a literary godfather. Although literary agency is still a comparatively young institution there are already on record many instances of loyal and long-standing friendships between author and agent, and this relationship is in a sense more valuable to the author than that with his publisher. There is rarely any conflict of interest between author and agent as there is often between author and publisher.

The ideal literary relationship is the trinity of author, publisher and agent, when all three parties like and trust each other implicitly. At first sight it may appear that the author with an agent need not have any dealings with his publisher, but there are many points on which it is better for author and publisher to consult independently of the agent. The experienced agent realises this. No author should be entirely a stranger to his publisher. The dictum, " Discuss business matters with your agent, literary matters with your publisher," is worth remembering in this connection, although it is misleading. Why should literary matters not be discussed with the agent ? True, in business matters the author doesn't as a rule speak the language, and the agent has to act on his behalf. But in literary matters the experienced agent should certainly be taken into the confidence of both author and publisher. And he usually is.

Although it is true that the established agent is on friendly terms with the majority of publishers, it is a mistake to imagine that the fact that a manuscript is submitted by an agent influences in any way the publisher's decision. So keen are most publishers to discover new talent that they give almost as much attention to

manuscripts submitted direct by unknown authors as to those sent in under an agent's imprint. While it is more probable that the agent knows better which publisher may be expected to be interested in the book, the unknown author is at no disadvantage when the MS. comes up for decision. It is equally a mistake to believe, as some writers apparently do, that an agent can succeed where they themselves have failed. An agent is not a miraculous person who can persuade a publisher to accept a manuscript just because he, and not the author, submits it. In this respect, the value of the agent is often greatly exaggerated, as the agent himself would be the first to admit.

It is when a publisher signifies his willingness to publish a book that the agent most emphatically justifies his existence. If a book is up to publication standard, finding a publisher for it is not so difficult as outsiders imagine ; but when terms have to be discussed and a contract drafted the agent reaches his high-water mark of utility to the author. The next chapter deals more fully with the various problems that arise at this stage, and in the handling of which the agent should demonstrate the importance of his rôle.

After the contract has been signed, various points are liable to arise in connection with the format and general production of the book. These the author can generally settle most satisfactorily by dealing direct with the publisher. There is no advantage to be gained, unless, for instance, the author lives abroad, by using the agent merely as a mouthpiece. When the book is actually published, however, the agent once more becomes active. In the collection of monies due and the scrutiny of



publishers' accounts the agent's services are most valuable. Here again his expert knowledge is of the utmost value to the author.

Does every author need an agent? This is a difficult question to answer, since every author is a law unto himself. Generally speaking, the agent is most useful to the established author, since there is more scope for negotiation than in the case of the new writer, and more international rights to be disposed of. As a rule the beginner would do better, I think, to approach at any rate *editors* direct. Most writers embark on short stories or articles to begin with, and with work of *this kind* it is not of much advantage to employ an agent, at any rate in the early stages of the writer's career. Later on, when he begins to find his work in print with increasing frequency, the author can profitably approach an agent. In fact the agent can rarely be of service in dealing with articles and short stories by new writers. He knows the market more intimately, it is true, but no young writer can hope for success unless he is himself more or less definitely aware beforehand of the likely markets for his work. Experience soon teaches that it is useless from a practical point of view to write an article or even a short story unless one already has some knowledge of the requirements of editors. It is like shooting without looking at the target.

The agent himself, reasonably enough, is as a rule only enthusiastic about the early efforts of beginners when they are of outstanding merit. Even then it is sometimes a profitable policy to advise the young author to learn to walk on his own legs and only to enlist the agent's support when he has made some progress. He will then be

able to appreciate the agent's services. Most well-known authors will testify that their first appearances in print were the result of their approaching editors direct ; and that the employment of an agent was a subsequent and inevitable step in their literary careers.

The foregoing remarks apply only to early articles and short stories, which are very seldom the subject of a contract. A book, on the other hand, is generally better handled by an agent than by the author direct, partly because there is more scope for negotiation and also because the contract should have expert supervision.

So much misconception prevails among even experienced authors as to the functions and real value of the literary agent that it is essential to emphasise his limitations. If an author has submitted a manuscript in vain to the majority of publishers it is unreasonable and impracticable to expect the agent to succeed where the author has failed. Not even the most persuasive agent can work the oracle under these conditions. This does not imply that an agent is debarred from handling a manuscript if it has already been seen and rejected by a few publishers ; it is a question to be decided by how much of the ground has already been covered by the author and by the circumstances of the case.

At the same time it is a mistake to assume that the agent cannot create a market. From the agent's point of view there are two kinds of financially unimportant authors : (*a*) those who haven't it in them to do anything that can be made good to sell ; and (*b*) those who have, but whose quality has not been discovered by editors and publishers.

Any sensible agent will avoid Class (*a*). On the other

hand, if he has any intelligence and aptitude for his job, he will work indefatigably for Class (*b*), even without profit at first, in the expectation that his perspicacity and confidence will be well rewarded when Class (*b*'s) market has been created. And the market has to be created.

The author's immediate market is not the public, but the publisher and editor. When an agent whose judgment is trusted goes to editor or publisher and says, "This is a really fine thing by an unknown author," that editor or publisher will set everything else aside and read the offering with hope—even excitedly—providing he knows from long experience that the agent doesn't make many mistakes about these discoveries. That is how a market can be, and in many thousands of instances has been, created.

But the creation of a market is not, after all, one of the most important weapons in the agent's armoury. Circumstances are naturally against him in this respect. Although more and more new authors are appearing on the horizon for whom such service may be rendered, it is the rising and the established author who benefits most from the employment of an agent. The more important an author is, the more complicated does the business side of his work become. An author "with a name" is a valuable property, and it requires a specialist to deal successfully with the numerous and intricate branches of its management.

Let me quote two instances from actual practice. The first is a certain novel of international interest. These are the sales which were negotiated by the author's agents: (1), American serial rights; (2), English serial rights;

(3), Australian serial rights ; (4), American and Canadian book rights ; (5), English and Australian book rights ; (6), Swedish book rights ; (7), Danish and Norwegian rights, book and serial ; (8), Continental rights in the English language ; (9), French book and serial rights ; (10), Italian book rights ; (11), Spanish book rights ; (12), Russian rights (although there is no copyright in Russia, and the sale amounted to £5) ; (13), Dutch rights ; (14-19), dramatic rights in six of the countries named ; (20), world film rights ; (21-23), second serial rights in three countries ; (24), Polish rights (a surprise to the agent himself) ; (25), cheap rights in Great Britain ; (26), separate cheap rights in America. And that has not yet exhausted all the commercial possibilities in this novel.

The other example is a non-fiction book recently published. Its history is rather curious. The author, who is a journalist, told me that he approached several publishers with a suggestion for a book on original lines. None of them seemed to be more than mildly interested. One publisher, in fact, was frank enough to tell him that, as nothing on the same lines had been published before, the proposition was too speculative. He agreed that there might be something in the idea, but declined to back his judgment. The author wisely decided to consult a literary agent, who urged him to write the book he had in mind before approaching a publisher. The agent knew from experience that publishers feel much more optimistic when the concrete manuscript is in their hands. The book duly materialised, and although eight publishers turned it down, the ninth saw its possibilities, and made an offer for the British Empire book rights. This was accepted.

The ice once broken, the rest was easy. Part of the book was sold for serialisation in this country, and an American syndicate, approached by the agent, agreed to cover the American newspaper market—which resulted in the syndication of about two-thirds of the material. The book was published in this country and proved an instant success. Three thousand copies—at 7s. 6d.—were sold in less than three weeks and within three months it had reached its tenth thousand. The book was an even bigger success in America.

In addition to these serial and book sales in America and the British Empire, foreign rights have already been sold to two countries and the field has not yet been covered. The sole calendar rights and the cigarette picture rights were next disposed of. It is true that applications were received by the author in respect of both of these—calendar and cigarette card rights are rarely to be found in the most enterprising agent's bag—but, naturally enough, the author hadn't the remotest idea of the value of such rights, and of course placed the matter in the hands of his agent, who was well able to safeguard his client's interests and ensure his reasonable remuneration.

There is still, of course, a certain body of opinion among publishers hostile to the literary agent. In a sense this is natural enough; but the publisher who resents the intrusion of the agent on the ground that the author, as a result, earns more and the publisher less, is a poor sort of publisher. What has really happened is that agents have sprung into being mainly as a result of the development of foreign and other new rights, and of conditions which called for the protection of authors' interests generally. Without agents who fully understand the

commercial side authors would be in a sorry plight. Although, of course, there have been some instances of rapacity on the part of agents, I think the sensible agent realises that, while it is his primary duty to get the best of terms and prices in the market, he must not kill the goose from which the golden royalties are expected. It is also part of his job to adjust and preserve that nice balance of interests between author and publisher which is so necessary to the successful outcome of their partnership. The agent should know better than to risk spoiling the market.

Another objection to agents, and one for which there are many sound reasons, is the not uncommon practice of playing off one publisher against another in negotiating an author's work. Such auction methods are indefensible. It is doubtful, however, whether any agent who values his reputation would adopt such methods. Price isn't everything. An increased advance or a royalty does not in itself justify an agent taking an author from one publisher to another.

Not unreasonably, publishers are inclined to suspect agents of persuading their authors to leave them in favour of another publisher who is willing to put up a more tempting offer. Let us consider the position. The agent might reason it out that he would benefit by such a transfer. True, he would thereby earn an increased commission. But such methods are obviously going to alienate the majority of publishers in the long run, and what agent can hope to carry on his business successfully if his customers are suspicious of his methods? No, the agent must value the goodwill of the publishers, and this can only be retained by straightforward tactics. Backstairs

intrigue may result in transient profits, but it is bad policy for the agent in the long run, and some of the leading agents, at any rate, are fully alive to the importance of maintaining, as far as possible, the cordial relations which should and so often do exist between the author and his publisher. And, most important of all, the agent must act in the best eventual interests of his authors, and we have already noted the advantages (see Chapter IV) of remaining with the same publisher.

Nowadays the influential agent is in a peculiarly favourable position. Publishers and editors, being anxious to secure the authors and contributions they want, are constantly reminding the agent of their requirements. The agent is usually in the position of having more openings for sales than he has material to supply. For the right kind of work there is in fact considerably more demand than supply. It cannot too often be emphasised that there is, relatively, a scarcity of saleable work. So large a proportion of the work of writers generally is merely wasted effort, and consequently unmarketable, that the average author frequently loses sight of the fact that there is a genuine scarcity of acceptable work.

Consequently, when an author begins to climb the literary ladder, he rapidly develops into a literary property which becomes more and more valuable out of all proportion to his progress. When an author begins to "boom" there is no telling how far he may go.

It is at this stage that the agent's services are most valuable to the author. Provided that all the threads are in his hands—an important point this—an author and his work may, with judicious handling, be converted into an exceedingly valuable literary property. It is

important that the whole of the author's business should be controlled or managed by one hand, since only in this way can the various and complicated threads be successfully manipulated. For instance, the organisation of a responsible literary agency enables sales to be made simultaneously in different parts of the world; enables the agent to determine whether it is wise to accept, say, a British offer for film rights or to wait for a bigger and, from the author's point of view, a better contract with an American film company. For it is not only the financial aspect that has to be considered. A publisher recently said :

The literary agent works on the theory that the publisher who pays the most is the best publisher, and that no other quality beyond a readiness to pay has real significance.

This is probably true of some agents but it is very unfair to the agent who has the best interests of his authors at heart. There are many other considerations—the author's reputation, for instance. An agent who advises an author to accept the highest bid for his work regardless of other considerations is doing his client a disservice even from a commercial point of view.

An author can only be commercially exploited with success by the co-ordination of all his interests; and this can only be accomplished by the literary agent with an experienced organisation.

There are many literary agents who do not come into this category. The "one-man" agent obviously is at a disadvantage in this respect. The bigger agent has more influence with publishers on account of the important authors and books he represents and more influence with





and the Agents shall be at liberty to exercise their discretion as to the advisability of themselves offering any particular work for sale.

3. The Agents shall collect and receive from purchasers all monies due to the Author under contracts or sales negotiated by them and shall account to the Author without undue delay for all such monies making deduction therefrom for commission as follows :

On British or American sales—ten per cent (10%).

On Foreign sales—ten per cent (10%) plus foreign agency fees not exceeding a further ten per cent (10%).

Such commission notwithstanding the termination of this Agreement shall continue to accrue in respect or in consequence of work done by the Agents. Where monies due under arrangements made by the Agents are paid direct to the Author the Author undertakes to pay to the Agents commission on the scale herein defined.

4. The Author will refer to the Agents all enquiries he may receive from publishers or other persons concerning any rights in his literary work.
5. Except for stamps on agreements, cost of foreign cables or postages, typing, and similar petty disbursements the Agents will not involve the Author in any pecuniary responsibility without his sanction.
6. The Agents will use their best endeavours to further the interests of the Author but they cannot guarantee that sales will be effected ; and while they will endeavour to sell only to such firms as they believe to be reliable they cannot accept responsibility for loss to the Author caused through bankruptcy or other default of a Purchaser.
7. Every reasonable care will be taken of manuscripts, etc., by the Agents, but they cannot be held responsible for accidental loss of or damage to the same.

The best type of agent, however, prefers to bind his authors solely by goodwill. It is the agent's business to satisfy his authors, and provided that they continue to

be satisfied he relies upon their continued loyalty to him with the dawning of more prosperous days. In practice this policy is on the whole successful. Authors as a race are loyal creatures, and only an unworthy minority will desert the agent who serves them faithfully and well in their struggling days in favour of another, unless they have good reason for dissatisfaction.

To-day there can be no doubt of the desirability of the useful agent as a literary institution. The old-time prejudice is fast disappearing. There are, of course, still some people who sincerely oppose a development which tends still further to commercialise literature. But it is inevitable. The agent who knows his job is an asset to the publishers and of inestimable, if varying, value to authors. Generally speaking, it cannot be denied that the rise of the literary agent has given a big impetus to the monetary return to authors for their work.

It is not too much to say that the responsible agent has it in his power to further the cause of literature. By putting authorship on a more attractive financial basis, new authors are encouraged to put pen to paper, and while this may well be regarded as a doubtful blessing, who knows whether work of permanent artistic value may not thereby be added to the scroll of literature?

One cannot condemn too emphatically the worthless agent, whose sole consideration is his own immediate profit. To justify his existence the agent must have a sound knowledge of, and a wide acquaintance with, books and authors, new and old, and a keen appreciation of what is and is not worth while. I do not mean to deprecate the publication of work which has merely a commercial value; there are sound reasons for defending

the production of books intended merely to entertain. The public has to be educated up to reading good books by a gradual process, and it is a truism that many a reader has begun by being absorbed in "blood-and-thunder" stories and finished up by appreciating the work of the acknowledged masters of literature.

The agent has, in fact, a serious responsibility, and with the growth of his power, an increasing responsibility. Authors, publishers and agents themselves should recognise this truth. It is especially important that agents themselves should not abuse their increasingly influential position. Every one with the cause of literature at heart should strive to eliminate the pest of the undesirable agent, at the same time recognising the indubitable value of the good agent. For when the agent *is* good, he is very, very good ; but when he is bad, he is indeed horrid.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONTRACTS

THE day when a publisher writes to say that he is interested in an author's book and is prepared to publish it is one to which every writer looks forward, especially if the experience is a novelty. On such an auspicious occasion the elated author is apt to regard the financial aspect as of minor importance beside the fact that a publisher likes his book and wants to publish it.

A form of contract—printed or typed—may accompany the letter, and the author should give this document careful consideration. Every reputable publisher would want him to do so, but there are a few publishers who would not hesitate to take advantage of a writer's inexperience, and they are fully aware of the psychological effect of a printed contract accompanying their acceptance of the book. The inexperienced author cheerfully and promptly puts his signature on a document which, he assumes, must be the regular form of agreement; he may, in his innocence, even think the terms generous. But he would be well advised to show any contract thus submitted to an expert before signing it. The young author who signs in haste often repents at leisure.

A formal contract between publisher and author was

not always considered necessary. Publishing in former times was not the highly specialised business it is to-day. In the old days an exchange of letters between author and publisher was sometimes all the agreement that was made. Even to-day we hear occasionally of agreements made in this way, but they call for an expression of child-like faith on the part of one or both parties. Where author and publisher have implicit faith in each other it is possible for such an amicable arrangement to work with complete satisfaction, but unexpected snags have a way of cropping up and friendships may easily be wrecked for lack of a definite understanding.

This is where a contract comes in. Briefly, the principal function of a contract is to put the rights and liabilities of the various parties so clearly that each will know exactly where he stands. It is fair both to publisher and author for the position to be stated clearly at the outset.

What form shall the contract take? It should state clearly the licence or rights which are to be conveyed to the publisher, what he shall pay in return for those rights, the territory in which he may sell his editions; it should also contain various other clauses of technical and practical importance to one or both parties. The practical application of certain clauses in the contract is often the responsibility of others, *e.g.*, the publisher's staff, or the author's executors, and it is therefore essential that the obligations of each party should be defined as clearly as possible in the form of a legal agreement.

An examination of specimen forms of publishing contracts will perhaps best illustrate the relative importance of the customary clauses. The most common form

of agreement, and in most cases the form most favourable to the author, is known as a royalty agreement. Contracts for novels are now more or less standardised, and it will suffice if we go through a specimen form in detail.

The agreement begins with a preamble which designates the parties to and the subject of the document :

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this      day of  
 19      BETWEEN      (hereinafter called the  
 Author) of      of the one part AND the firm of  
 (hereinafter called the Publishers) of the other part  
 WHEREBY it is mutually agreed as follows respecting a  
 work of fiction entitled :

It will be observed that the agreement is drawn up between the firm and the author, no provision being made for transfer to the publisher's or author's successors and assigns—a provision of obvious advantage to the publisher. It might conceivably be to the author's disadvantage that the contract should be assigned elsewhere by the publisher, but in these days of limited liability companies the fact that an agreement is not assignable cannot prevent an assignment virtually taking place. Controlling interest in a company can easily change hands by share transfers. In practice most agreements provide for assignment, and certain publishers like to have included in their agreements a clause making the agreement transmissible to anyone carrying on their business. This is the usual wording :

The expression " the Publishers " as used throughout this agreement shall be deemed to include the person or persons or company for the time being carrying on the business of the said      whether under its present or any future style or any subsidiary company of

the said \_\_\_\_\_ and the benefits of this agreement shall be transmissible accordingly and the benefits accruing to the Author under this agreement shall be transmissible to his heirs executors administrators personal representatives and assigns.

An author must beware of the possibility of his publishers becoming bankrupt or going into liquidation. Cases have occurred of authors who have been unable to obtain release from their agreements when royalties due have not been paid. The only safeguard is the insertion in the out-of-print clause (to which we come presently) of wording to this effect : " if by reason of bankruptcy *or any other cause* payment due to the author is not made as agreed herein within three months after the date of a written demand from the author or his representatives for such payment then this agreement shall be considered as cancelled and all rights in the said work granted in this agreement shall revert to the Author forthwith and without further procedure."

Clause 1 in our specimen novel agreement is as follows :

The Publishers shall during the legal term of copyright have the exclusive licence of producing and publishing the said novel in volume form in the English language within the limits of the British Empire subject to the conditions following :

This specifies the licence conveyed to the publisher and the extent of the territory in which he is free to sell the work. The limitation of territory to the area *normally covered by the publisher's operations* is important. Most English publishers cover the British Empire only



and have little or no selling machinery in other parts of the world; hence the limitation quoted above. It is obviously to the advantage of the author to make separate contracts with publishers in other territories, *e.g.*, in the U.S.A. It is also important that the author should reserve the right to make an agreement for the English language rights on the continent of Europe but if the English publisher has a sales organisation on the Continent there can be no objection to granting him a licence—but *not* an exclusive licence, which would preclude a Tauchnitz or similar arrangement—to sell his editions in Europe.

In the phrase “ volume form *in the English language* ” the italicised words are important. Such qualification is vitally necessary in cases where the publisher’s territory is extended to, let us say, “ throughout the world except the U.S.A.” This is the form used by some publishers in contracts made direct with authors: and many an unwary author has thus allowed the control of translation rights to pass out of his hands. In the past publishers included foreign rights in their contracts as a matter of course, for they were regarded, and rightly so, as valuable “ pickings ” which occasionally materialised in the form of applications from foreign publishers. In such contracts there was usually a clause entitling the author to 50 per cent or 75 per cent of the proceeds from the resale of translation rights—the publisher thus putting himself in the position of a literary agent working at 50 or 25 per cent commission, and, in nineteen cases out of twenty, a passive literary agent at that. Small wonder that the publisher is nowadays restricted to his own territory and his own business!

I know only one English publisher with a thorough knowledge of the Continental market and the ability to sell foreign rights advantageously on behalf of his authors, but he must be regarded as an exception. For the rest, the publisher's claim to participation in proceeds from subsidiary rights is resisted by literary agents and the Society of Authors, not perhaps because the claim is unreasonable (in practice it is not always so, cf. page 533) but because in the past publishers have abused the privilege, both in taking more than a nominal percentage for themselves and in carelessly letting rights go to the first buyer who ventured a cash offer. Since foreign rights passed into the hands of literary agents, one international agency in particular, it is significant that advances on account of royalties have gradually taken the place of the small outright payments formerly made by German, Scandinavian, and other foreign publishers.

If an author is contracting directly with a publisher he should therefore either reserve all rights other than *the volume rights in the English language throughout the British Empire* unless he is convinced that the publisher is qualified to deal with particular subsidiary rights. It is nearly always a mistake for an author to hand over his rights in a bundle to the publisher. Not because the publisher will cheat him, but because incompetence will have the same results. The business of publishers is publishing, not literary agency.

What is the use of reserving subsidiary rights which I have no facilities for disposing of? the author may pertinently ask. Should he wait for applications to roll in and then consult a lawyer or the Society of Authors?

Well, waiting for applications is not good business. What the average lawyer knows about the ramifications of literary business could be written on a postcard. The Society of Authors is an excellent institution, if as the late Lord Dewar said of marriage, you like institutions. The Society does admirable and necessary work in certain directions, but its attitude towards publishers leaves me with the impression that all publishers are by nature rogues and vagabonds, and that agents and publishers alike were put into the world to fleece the innocent author. Such an attitude is not very helpful. My own experience of the Society's advice on contracts makes me regret, for its own sake, that the Society does not put a practical business man in charge of its advice bureau. Lawyers are always ready with legal advice, which does not always solve an author's difficulties. They are often too prone to regard the legal shadow as more important than the royalty substance. I hope one day to see the present inadequacy of the Society of Authors in this respect replaced by sensible and efficient treatment of publishing problems. It is proper that legal advice should be readily obtainable, but it is surely not impossible for the Society to secure the services of someone with practical experience of publishing and authorship to deal with members' problems. It is not good for the profession of authorship that its own trade union should command such little respect in many publishing offices.

The only suggestion I can make to the enquiring author is to place the disposal of his rights in the hands of an agent qualified to deal with them. In the case of foreign rights the ordinary literary agent is as helpless as the ordinary publisher; an agency with an international

organisation is the best and most practical means of selling foreign rights

2. The Publishers shall publish the said novel at their own expense and in such style as to be sold at a published price of about 7s. 6d. (seven shillings and sixpence) net in the first instance within six months of the date of this agreement unless prevented by circumstances over which they have no control

This clause imposes on the publisher the obligation to publish the work at the standard price and within a reasonable time. The Society of Authors urges the author to "fix" such details as published price and date of publication. The wisdom of this advice is open to question. A publisher who is investing his capital can usually be depended upon to publish at such price and at such a time as will give the book the best possible chance of success. In any case it is very exceptional for an author's judgment on such points to be superior to a publisher's. It is, however, important that a time limit should be set, for otherwise an unscrupulous publisher might contract for a book without really intending to publish it at all, merely in order to prevent the book being acquired by another publisher. The phrase "within six months of the date of this agreement" is customary when the manuscript has been delivered to the publisher. If the contract is made prior to delivery, "within six months of delivery of the complete manuscript ready for press" is the usual formula. A longer period would of course often be necessary in the case of a serious work involving more detailed preparation for press. Some publishers prefer to fix the time limit from the date when proofs are finally passed for press by the author.

3. The Author hereby warrants to the Publishers that the said novel is in no way whatever a violation of any existing copy-right and that it contains nothing obscene, indecent or (with the intention of the Author) libellous and will indemnify the Publishers against any loss, injury or damage, including any legal costs or expenses properly incurred, occasioned to or incurred by the Publishers in consequence of any breach (unknown to the Publishers) of this warranty. And it is hereby further agreed that in the following cases any loss, injury or damage (including any legal costs or expenses as aforesaid) occasioned to or incurred by either the Author or the Publishers or both shall be contributed to and borne and paid by the Author and the Publishers in equal shares, namely :

- (a) Where any matter contained in the said novel shall be held to constitute a libel upon a person to whom it shall appear the Author did not intend to refer.
- (b) Where an unsuccessful action is brought in respect of an alleged libel contained in the said novel, and
- (c) Where any proceedings are threatened instituted or prosecuted for any alleged libel contained in the said novel and the claim is settled before judgment with the consent of the Author and the Publishers.

A libel clause is necessary and few contracts omit it. The wording of this clause was approved by the Publishers' Association after consultation with the Society of Authors and is now being more generally adopted by publishers and literary agents. Cases of genuine libel are rare. Nothing can prevent libel actions being brought against authors and publishers, who are always liable to be shot at by irresponsible and spiteful litigants ; except perhaps concerted action on the part of publishers and authors, with a fund at their common disposal, on the lines of the protective scheme of the newspaper proprietors, association in the U.S.A.

It is even more important for the publisher to avoid actions for libel than it is for the author, since the publisher has a place of business and can usually be made to pay if the verdict goes against him. Authors, on the other hand, are often too elusive and financially insubstantial to encourage the alleged victims of libel to proceed against them. When judgment is obtained it is nearly always the publisher who has to pay.

For that reason manuscripts are carefully examined with a view to libel in most publishing offices before they are sent to the printers. Libel in fiction is difficult and, for the publisher, often impossible to detect ; in the case of general books, particularly memoirs and criticism, any libellous suggestions can usually be removed in time.

4. Accounts of sales of the said work shall be made up to the thirtieth day of June and the thirty-first day of December in each year and delivered and settled within three months thereafter the Publishers paying the Author as follows :
  - (a) A royalty of 10% (ten per cent) of the published price of every copy sold of the original English edition up to 2,000 (two thousand) copies ; 12½% (twelve and one-half per cent) on the next 1,500 (fifteen hundred) copies ; 15% (fifteen per cent) on the next 1,500 (fifteen hundred) copies ; and 20% (twenty per cent) on copies sold beyond 5,000 (five thousand).
  - (b) A royalty of 10% (ten per cent) of the published price of cheaper editions published at or below one-half the original published price.
  - (c) A royalty of 10% (ten per cent) of the price obtained on copies sold to the Colonies or as a special Colonial edition.
  - (d) 10% (ten per cent) of the sum received from the sale of any copies of the said work as a remainder the Author having first been given the option of purchasing some or all of such copies at the remainder price.

- (e) The Publishers shall pay to the Author on the day of publication of the said work the sum of £30 (thirty pounds) in advance and on account of the foregoing royalties.

Semi-annual accountings are the rule with most publishers, a further three months being allowed for settlement, owing to the long credit which often has to be given to booksellers and the time taken to complete the records of sales for the half-year. If an author suspects the accuracy of his publisher's accounts he is entitled to inspect, or have inspected on his behalf, the account books which refer to the publication; but authors are not recommended to question the integrity of their publishers in this way unless their suspicions are well founded.

Any author who wants to know how books are sold—and every author should know at least something of the highly involved process—should turn to Mr. Stanley Unwin's book *The Truth About Publishing*, where the subject is intelligibly and comprehensively treated.

The actual figures given in this specimen clause are representative of normally good "first novel" royalties. Royalty scales vary with the nature and importance of the book to be published. In the case of novels, where published price and format are standardised, the minimum royalty can be taken as 10 per cent and the maximum 25 per cent. Novelists who are "best-sellers" usually begin at 20 per cent and receive 25 per cent if the sales exceed a stated figure. The increased percentage is made possible by the reduction in production costs per copy when the publisher is assured of a big sale before he gives his printing order. *Cf. Producing and Marketing a Book*, pages 583 to 589. A comparison of the

receipts of author and publisher is given in the same chapter.

*Cheap edition* royalties are necessarily on a smaller scale, owing to the reduced margin between production costs and the publisher's receipts. A 10 per cent royalty on 3s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. editions is now customary ; on 2s. editions most publishers find it impracticable to pay more than 1½d. per copy. The usual royalties on shilling and sixpenny editions if published, are respectively ½d. and ¼d. per copy. It is the practice of some publishers who specialise in very cheap editions to pay £1 or 15s. per thousand copies sold (and pro rata) of sixpenny editions.

*Colonial royalties* need explanation. A smaller percentage is payable because the publisher's receipts are smaller. Copies are sold to the Colonial buyers at about one-third of the English published price and the author's royalty is equitably based on the amount received.

Some publishers prefer to pay 3d. or 4d. per copy on Colonial sales. As the average price realised per copy is 2s. 9d., it will be seen that a fraction over 3d. represents 10 per cent, the difference thus being negligible under present conditions.

*Remainder copies* are copies sold at a reduced price (in the case of a novel, usually at about 1s. a copy) to special buyers. Publishers often dispose in this way of the stock of a book when the regular demand has ceased. Some publishers stipulate that no royalty should be payable on copies sold at less than actual cost of manufacture but the specimen wording quoted is quite usual. It is also customary to give notice to the author (or to his agents) of the intention to remainder. Some contracts contain a provision that remaindering shall not take place



within two years of first publication without the sanction of the author.

*Advance royalties.* It is the recognised practice of the majority of publishers to pay the author on the day of publication a sum in anticipation of the royalties his book will earn. The amount depends on the book itself. Advances run into thousands of pounds for novels by famous authors and important biographies and memoirs for which the publisher is justified in anticipating an immediate and big sale. For certain types of book, *e.g.*, work of economic or scientific interest, which can only be expected to sell steadily over a number of years, advances, if paid at all, are usually nominal. The £30 allowed for by our specimen contract is an average figure for a first novel under present conditions. Fifty or seventy-five pounds are favourable to the author; a hundred pounds for a first novel by an unknown author is an exceptional advance, but has occasionally been paid.

Not every publisher is prepared to pay an advance. A publisher may claim, not unreasonably, that the particular book under discussion is a publishing gamble; it may do well or may only sell a hundred copies. It would, however, be unreasonable for a publisher to refuse to pay what is known as a subscription, or accrued advance. An accrued advance is a sum equivalent to the amount earned in royalties by the number of copies sold to the trade up to and including the day of publication.

It is easy to sympathise with the reluctance of some publishers to pay big advances, for greedy authors and over-zealous literary agents have taken unfair advantage in the past of the competition which exists among publishers. A publisher may be tempted to pay a disproportionate

advance it only to prevent a rival firm securing the author's work. Advances are not returnable; that is to say, if a publisher pays £100 on account and the book earns only £20 in royalties the author is not (in practice, whatever the legal position may be) called upon to refund the unearned balance of £80.

Advance payments are nearly always made on day of publication. Occasionally a payment is made to the author on delivery of his manuscript: say, half the advance, the balance being payable on publication. Occasionally, in the case of an important book, an advance payment is made on signature of the agreement.

Publishers pay advances because they realise that authors must live. Few authors can afford to wait for the royalties their books will earn. It would be a case of the horse starving while the grass grows. In my view, publishers are themselves to blame for the abuses to which advances have been subject, for it is only natural that impecunious authors and greedy agents should so often turn to the highest bidder. If publishers were to combine with a view to regulating the scale of advances it might be a good thing for publishing. On the other hand, Publisher A's willingness to pay more in advance than Publisher B is usually taken as expressive of greater enthusiasm and confidence. That is why Publisher B, who may be the better publisher for the book in the long run, often fails to get it. I fear that the present evils of the advance system will continue so long as money is important to authors and rivalry exists among publishers. And we must leave it at that.

5. All details as to the manner of production, publication and advertisement and the number and destination of free copies

shall be left to the sole discretion of the Publishers who shall bear all expenses in connection therewith except the amount (if any) of Author's corrections other than printers' errors in the proofs in excess of 15% (fifteen per cent) of the cost of composition which extra amount shall be borne by the Author and settled in account.

The first part of this clause is self-explanatory. It properly gives the publisher, whose money is at stake, control over production and advertising expenditure. In practice, however, most publishers turn an indulgent ear to the author who wants to make reasonable requests. The author is often consulted about the colour of the binding, the wrapper design and other production details. Suggestions in regard to review copies and even advertising are welcome, provided they are sensible and would not involve the publisher in unjustifiable trouble or expense.

*Author's corrections.* This is a point of practical importance to both author and publisher. The author should thoroughly revise his manuscript before it goes to the printers. Any alterations which are made after the book is in type *cost money*. See *Producing and Marketing a Book*, page 575. The cost of correction of type is an expensive item and the publisher is bound to fix some limit which can be allowed for the author's proof corrections. Some publishers allow only 10 per cent of the cost of composition; anything higher than 15 per cent is rare. Sometimes the actual amount is stated in the contract, e.g., £7 10 0, or at the rate of so much per sheet of 32 pages, or even so much per printed page.

6. The Author shall receive on publication six presentation copies of the work and shall be entitled to purchase further copies for personal use at the lowest trade price.

This is a customary clause. The author receives (usually) six presentation copies and is entitled to buy further copies (on which, it should be noted, royalties are payable) at the trade discount, this concession being limited to copies required for personal use, but not for re-sale.

7. The Author shall be free to arrange with any other Publisher after two years from the date of first English publication or sooner by mutual consent of the parties hereto for the re-issue of the said novel in any form at a less or higher price than that covered by the Publishers of the first English edition but the said Publishers of the first English edition shall first be given the option for three months after receiving notice in writing so to do of themselves bringing out such new editions as the Author desires.

The wording of this clause varies considerably. Its general effect is to give the author power to withdraw his book from a neglectful publisher. In practice it rarely happens that a publisher will decline to re-issue a book for which there is likely to be an appreciable demand, but it is necessary to legislate for exceptions. Publishers are sometimes preoccupied with new books to the exclusion of old, and the author is entitled to call for a cheap edition.

8. If the said novel be allowed to go out of print to the extent of the Publishers having less than fifty copies in stock and they shall neglect to issue a new edition within six months of having received written request to do so the Author shall be at liberty to make such arrangements as he thinks for publication of any further edition or editions of the said novel and all rights under this agreement shall revert to the Author.

Another clause for the author's protection and one which has been resisted by publishers. At first sight it

may seem indisputably just that an author should regain control of his book if the publisher allows it to go out of print and refuses to reprint. But would a publisher refuse to reprint if it were economically justified? Possibly he might. Some publishers argue that, if an author wishes to reclaim his book under these circumstances, he should either repay the balance of the unearned advance (if any) or take over, at cost or half cost or an agreed price, any moulds or stereotypes made specially for the work. The Society of Authors considers that the author should have *an option* on the plant, but not be obliged to exercise it. This is, for the publisher, a case of tails the author wins, heads the publisher loses.

The fallacy underlying this *out-of-print* clause is simply this: an author may demand a reprint before the time is ripe. Publishers sometimes reprint books which have been out of print for years. To quote Mr. Stanley Unwin:

Experience shows that to reprint a very slow-selling book immediately it goes out of print is to court an almost certain loss, whereas a year or two's delay may make the venture a commercially practicable one, and, incidentally, give the reprint a much better send-off. There are sufficient reasons for this; the stock on hand at the booksellers' gets absorbed; the book gets advertised and asked for in the second-hand trade, and the supply of second-hand copies becomes exhausted; the publisher accumulates orders, so that, when the reprint does eventually come, there is a market awaiting it. The difference is considerable because, in addition to supplying the outstanding orders, the publisher is able to induce booksellers to stock the work again—particularly if the book has been frequently demanded. This gives it a fresh send-off, which, otherwise, would have been impossible.

It is fair, as Mr. Unwin himself admits, that an author

should be able to regain control of his book in the event of the publisher refusing, after due notice, to reprint it ; but if there is any dispute as to when it should be reprinted it is unfair to disregard altogether the interests of the publisher, especially if, as often happens in such cases, he is out of pocket on the publication.

9. If the Publishers should not make payment of monies due or deliver statements to the Author as agreed herein within three months after the date of a written demand from the Author or his representatives for such payment or such delivery then this agreement shall be considered to be cancelled and all rights in the said novel granted in this agreement shall revert to the Author without further notice and without prejudice to royalties and other monies due to him from the Publishers.

From the author's point of view this is an ideally protective clause. Nothing is more exasperating or unfair to an author than to be tied helplessly to a publisher who cannot, or will not, pay overdue royalties. A mere "bankruptcy" provision is not enough. Some publishers profess indignation when a clause of this kind is inserted, but it is difficult to see why.

10. All dramatic, cinematograph, serial, translation and other rights not specifically granted in this agreement are reserved by the Author

Although Clause 1 of the contract clearly defines the publisher's licence, this additional clause (usually inserted, with the publisher's approval, for the enlightenment of the author) makes it clear that *all* other rights are reserved in the author's favour.

Is a publisher ever justified in claiming a share of

"outside" proceeds? I think, *under certain conditions*, he is. But before we consider this point, it must be observed that publishers cannot always afford to claim what may be reasonably due to them. Why? The answer lies in the word "competition." So long as there are good publishers content to have their licence or rights strictly limited, authors and agents will favour them. But, to my mind, there is no doubt that *under certain conditions* (I again italicise the phrase) a publisher is entitled to a share of the author's proceeds from the sale of such rights as film and American. In the eyes of the Society of Authors and most literary agents this is, I am well aware, rank heresy, but no matter.

Let us consider a first novel. Admittedly speculative, under present conditions. The majority of first novels result in loss for the publisher. But *publication* often makes an American or film sale possible. Very, very few English first novels are sold in America, or to film companies, prior to English publication. On the other hand, the author often benefits substantially by such contracts while the publisher who made them possible is the poorer as a result of his enterprise. It is therefore reasonable, in my view, that the original publisher should receive a modest percentage. It should, I think, be restricted to ten or fifteen per cent, twenty-five per cent at the outside, *with an agreed limitation, e.g., £100*: and with the further condition that if the sales of the English edition exceed, say, 2,000 copies (*i.e.*, if it shows a profit on its own) the participation should be automatically cancelled. Such arrangements should obviously apply only to books which are undoubtedly speculative from the publisher's standpoint. But, as I pointed out, such

participation by publishers, although justifiable, is rarely conceded in practice owing to the competitive nature of the publishing business.

There remains only one clause commonly included in royalty agreements for novels ; this is the option clause. Here is a specimen form :

The Publishers shall have the option of publishing the next two novels which the Author may write after the novel the subject of this agreement, which said two novels shall be of not less than 80,000 (eighty thousand) words each in length on the same terms and conditions as previously detailed in this agreement except that the advance on day of publication of each of the said novels shall be £30 (thirty pounds) or the amount which shall have been earned in royalties by the about 7s. 6d. (seven shillings and sixpence) edition of the preceding novel in each case during the first six months of publication, whichever sum shall be the greater, and the royalties on each of the said two novels shall begin where those of the preceding novel left off, that is to say for example, if the sales of the novel the subject of this agreement in its dearest form exceed 2,000 (two thousand) copies the next following novel shall earn a royalty of 12½% (twelve and one-half per cent) from the first copy sold. The Publishers shall give their decision to exercise such option within six weeks of delivery to them of complete copy or proofs of the novels in each case. In the event of the Publishers declining the first of such option novels their option on the second shall be cancelled. The Publishers agree to publish the said option novels if they accept the same within six months of delivery to them of complete copy of the novel in each case but the Publishers shall not be obliged to publish any two novels within six months of one another.

I have referred elsewhere\* to the importance, from the publisher's point of view, of an option on a novelist's



future books. Authors do not always like committing their work in advance, but it must be remembered that only by doing so can they reasonably expect publishers to invest time and money in early and probably unprofitable books. The Society of Authors solemnly warns authors not to bind themselves for future work to any publisher. "As well bind yourself for the future to any one solicitor or doctor!" This advice might charitably be described as a counsel of perfection; but to anyone with practical experience of publishing conditions it is rather comic. An option on the next two, or three, novels is fair; an option on one is hardly enough; on more than three may be unfair to the author. The stipulation as to length in the specimen clause quoted is to protect the publisher against manuscripts falling short of conventional length. Short novels are difficult to sell to the booksellers and very few publishers welcome them.

The option terms, it will be seen, are on a sliding scale, the author's advance and royalties on future novels being calculated on the success of his preceding book. A time limit for the publisher's decision is imposed for the author's protection and—this is important—the publisher's further option is cancelled altogether if he declines an option book. As at least nine out of every ten publishers insist on an option clause, it is practically impossible for the author to make a one-book contract with another publisher for the manuscript which his first publisher has refused. Few publishers can be tempted to contract for a single novel while another firm still has an option on the author's future work.

The specimen clause contains a time limit for publication of the option books, but equitably prevents the

publisher from being called upon to publish books in too rapid a succession. Obviously, it would be disadvantageous to publish a new novel while its predecessor by the same author was actively selling. The booksellers would certainly object. The average life of a novel is about three months, and it is seldom good policy to publish more than two novels by the same author in one year.

Some option clauses do not fix terms but leave negotiation open until the time comes. In such cases the wording runs like this : " the terms to be mutually agreed upon as and when such novels are ready." This is really equivalent to giving the publisher only the opportunity of offering terms for the author's next book or books, for it will readily be seen that the author can, if he wishes, demand big terms and thus probably free himself from the publisher. However, the form of wording is quite common among publishers who trust to their authors' loyalty and goodwill.

Equivalent to the option clause in its binding of future books is the clause by which the publisher definitely contracts for a stated number of books by the author. This is common in contracts with established authors, whose work the publisher is satisfied to commission on terms settled beforehand.

This completes our survey of a royalty agreement for a novel, but something must be said about the agency clause. When authors deal direct with publishers it is usually left to the publisher to send the author the form of agreement, but as most novel agreements are drawn up by agents on their authors' behalf (an arrangement obviously favourable to the author if his agent is vigilant) the final clause is something like the following :

All monies due under this agreement shall be paid to the Author's representatives whose receipt shall be a discharge of the monies received and the said is hereby empowered by the Author to conduct negotiations with the Publishers in respect of all matters arising in any way out of this agreement but the authority given to the Publishers under this clause may be revoked by the said Author at any time on giving notice to the said Publishers who shall then upon notification to the said pay direct to the Author all monies due under this agreement less 10% (ten per cent) which shall be paid by the said Publishers to the said at the same time the remainder is paid to the Author and in such case none but the Author's receipt shall be a full and sufficient discharge to the Publishers.

This agency clause has received the approval of the Society of Authors and is accepted by most publishers without question.

Now we can turn to other forms of publishing agreements. These consist of (a) outright sale, (b) half-profits, and (c) publication on commission. These, with the more common royalty agreement, comprise the methods of obtaining book publication.

The first, an *outright sale* of copyright, or specified rights, was at one time the most common form of publishing agreement. Most of the books now sold on this basis are "juveniles," in which by-products seldom exist. Although an author may be tempted to accept a cash offer for his copyright he will usually be unwise to do so, especially in the case of a novel, which may bring in receipts from film, serial, and other subsidiary rights. Many novels which were sold outright subsequently proved very successful, *e.g.*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, by Thomas Hardy, and *The Viper of Milan*, by Marjorie

Bowen. "There are points in favour of an outright purchase," says Mr. Stanley Unwin. "No other method gives a publisher such a free hand to make any and every use of literary material and to exploit every possibility of finding markets for it. No other plan gives a publisher so much inducement to advertise. In fact, it is quite conceivable that an author would gain, on balance, as much as he would lose by the outright sale of say one or possibly even two of his earlier works, if the deal were made with a really enterprising firm of good standing. His reward would come with the publication of his subsequent books, for which a market would have been established."

Outright purchases are not often satisfactory to the publisher, for in the event of the book proving successful beyond anticipation, the all-too-human author naturally repents of his bargain. The publisher is consequently faced with the alternatives of making *ex gratia* payments to the author (such payments have, in fact, often been made by publishers) or of enduring, if he does not actually have to listen to, the embittered comments of the author. However, outright purchase need not detain us. If an author has to choose between an outright payment and no publication at all, acceptance is justified, due consideration being given to the price offered. But the principle of outright purchase is bad.

*Half-profits, or profit-sharing, agreements*, to which we come next, are best avoided by authors, although under certain conditions their existence is justified. Under a half-profits agreement the actual costs of production and advertising, with an additional percentage to cover the publisher's overhead expenses, have to be worked off



Publishers may, if they think fit, decline to publish the work, in which case this Agreement will be annulled, but the Author shall not be at liberty to publish the work elsewhere without first offering it to the Publishers on the terms of this Agreement.

2. The Author warrants to the Publishers that the said work is in no way whatever a violation of any existing copyright, and that it contains nothing of a libellous or scandalous character.
3. The copyright in the work shall remain the property of the Author, but the Publishers shall, during the legal term of unrestricted copyright, have the exclusive licence to print and publish the work, or any part thereof, in the English language throughout the world. During the continuance of such exclusive licence the Publishers shall have the entire control of the publication, and the paper, print, binding and embellishments, and the price and terms of sale of the first or any subsequent edition shall be in their sole discretion.
4. The net profits arising from the sale of the work and remaining after deduction of the expenses of production shall be divided into two equal parts, of which one part shall be paid to the Author and the other part shall belong to and be retained by the Publishers.
5. The expenses of production shall be taken to mean the actual sums paid by the Publishers for printing, paper, binding, illustrating and advertising, and all incidental expenditure, including any warehousing charges incurred, provided that such charges shall not exceed the scale rates fixed by the Bookbinders' and Printers' Associations.
6. The Publishers shall not be entitled to make any charge for advertisements in their own publications, and the Author shall be entitled to full details of any sum spent on newspaper advertising.
7. The Publishers shall account for the sales of the work at two-thirds of the published price less an allowance of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent to cover travellers' commissions, 13 copies in all cases to be reckoned as 12.
8. Provided always that should it be thought desirable to dispose

of copies of the book or of the "remainder" or a part or parts thereof at a reduced price or by auction, whether for the American, Dominion, Colonial, Indian or other foreign market or markets or in England, then and in every such case the net amount thus realised shall be carried to the credit of the book. But no copies shall be sold as a remainder within two years of first publication and the Author shall have the first option of purchasing such remainder stock.

9. The Author agrees to bear all costs of corrections and alterations made by him in the proof sheets (printer's errors excepted) in excess of twelve and one half per cent of the cost of composition.
10. The Author agrees to revise the first, and, if it be necessary, at any time during the continuance of the said exclusive licence, to edit and revise every subsequent edition of the work, and from time to time to supply any new matter that may be needful to keep the work up to date. In the event of the Author neglecting or being unable by reason of death or otherwise to revise or edit the work or supply new matter where needful, the Publishers may procure some other person to revise or edit the work, or supply new matter, and may deduct the expense thereof from the share of profits payable to the Author, provided that the name of the person so procured and the nature of the revision or editing shall plainly appear upon the work. The Publishers shall include an index if the Author provides the necessary "copy" for the same.
11. The Publishers shall make up the account of profit and loss annually to the 31st December in each year and deliver the same to the Author within four months thereafter, and the balance appearing in such account to be due to the Author shall be settled on the 1st May immediately following.
12. The Publishers shall have the sole right to sell or assign the American, Colonial, Continental, Foreign, translation, and serial rights in the above work, and shall pay all costs of negotiating such sales and of distributing copies of the work for such purposes. The Publishers shall pay to the Author three fourths of the receipts from the sale of any such rights, such amounts to be payable on delivery of the account provided for in Clause 11 hereof. The Publishers shall have authority

- (unless and until revoked by the Author) to sell or lease the Cinema rights in the said work and shall pay to the Author eighty per cent of the net proceeds received by the Publishers in respect of such rights.
13. The Author shall be entitled to six free copies of the said work and shall be entitled to purchase further copies on the usual trade terms.
  14. The Author shall either personally or by his agents and at any reasonable time after notice given in writing have access to the Publishers' books in so far as they relate to his work.
  15. The Publishers shall have the first offer of the Author's next literary work suitable for publication in book form.
  16. In the event of the Publishers going into liquidation the Author may within three months of the winding-up order or resolution give notice in writing to the Liquidator that he desires to revoke the exclusive licence to the Publishers to print and publish the work. And in the event of the Author giving such notice the same exclusive licence shall terminate and all the rights granted to the Publishers by this Agreement shall revert to the Author, except such rights granted by Clause 12 hereof, as shall have already been exercised, sold, let or otherwise disposed of by the Publishers, but the Author shall purchase from the Liquidator all copies of the book in hand and all plates or moulds, engravings of electrotypes produced or purchased specially for the work at such price as failing agreement may be determined by arbitration. And in the event of the Author not giving such notice the Liquidator may assign the benefit of this Agreement to any purchaser of the Publishers' business, or with the Author's consent in writing to any other Publisher (such consent not to be unreasonably withheld).

AS WITNESS the hands of the Parties :

Although this agreement compares favourably with the forms used by many publishers, it is not an ideal agreement from the author's point of view. The date of publication should be provided for



within, say, six months of delivery of the manuscript. The exclusive licence to "publish . . . in the English language throughout the world" may not be to the author's advantage—it depends on the book—and would certainly be disadvantageously comprehensive in contracts with many other publishers. The allowance of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent towards the cost of travellers' commissions is generous to the author; and it should also be noted that no charge is made by the publishers for their working expenses. The reckoning of thirteen copies as twelve is out-of-date, however. Clause 12 would be dangerous if the author were dealing with an incompetent or careless publisher. Finally, it ought to be possible for the author in certain circumstances to regain control of his book in the event of it going out of print or of non-payment of monies due to him. But on the whole this is a sound form of agreement.

Before signing an agreement of this kind the author should satisfy himself that the charges for printing, paper, binding, advertising, etc., will be *as paid by the publisher*; i.e., at net, invoice prices. "House" advertising, that is advertisements in periodicals under the publisher's control, should be specially eliminated, or subject to the author's approval and consent. Only in this way can the author safeguard himself. The publisher's overhead charges should also be carefully considered; 10 or 15 per cent is not an exorbitant figure, but anything beyond 15 per cent should be opposed.\*

*Publication on commission*, that is at the author's expense, is an arrangement which obviously cannot appeal

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\* Cf. page 469.

to many writers. For certain classes of book it is, however, the only practicable form of publication. Books which have a limited appeal, for example, regimental or family histories, or work for which there is little public demand, such as poetry by unknown writers, can only be published in this way. Here again an author should deal only with a firm of irreproachable standing. Publishers who specialise in books financed by authors should be avoided.

The author who publishes his book on commission is in the position of hiring a publisher's producing and publication machinery, paying the publisher a sum to cover manufacture and advertising of the edition and allowing him a percentage on sales. The author should, therefore, obtain beforehand detailed estimates of the cost of production. A stated sum should be allotted to advertising expenditure, which should remain strictly under the author's control. The choice of type, paper, binding and wrapper design should be made by the author, who should also control the number and destination of review and other presentation copies; and the size of the edition and published price. Most of these points are usually settled in consultation between the author and his publisher. The publisher's commission on sales should of course be calculated on receipts and not on the published price. As the customary  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent discount will usually apply to copies sold, the author should protect himself by agreeing to the publisher basing his commission on two-thirds of the published price, no copies to be sold at a lower rate without the author's consent. Provision must be made for the regular rendering of accounts, half-yearly statements and payments

being customary ; and, finally, the publisher should be restricted at the author's option to a lease of time, so that if the author is dissatisfied he should be at liberty at the end of the stated term to withdraw the stock (which is his property) and make other arrangements for its disposal.

The best advice I can offer an author who contemplates publishing at his own expense is to read pages 108 to 114 of Mr. Stanley Unwin's book, where he will find a clear, admirable, and thoroughly sound examination of the position. For general guidance I quote (again by kind permission of Messrs. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.) a specimen form of agreement for publication on commission.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this                      day  
of                      19                      , between                      of  
                    (hereinafter called "the Author") for                      self,  
                    executors, administrators and assigns, of the one  
part, and GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN, LTD., of 40,  
Museum Street, London (hereinafter called "the Publishers")  
for themselves, their successors and assigns of the other  
part. Whereas the Author is the Proprietor of the Copyright  
in a literary work at present entitled :

which he desires the Publishers to publish, now it is hereby  
agreed between the Author and Publishers as follows :—

1. The Author shall pay to the Publishers on signing this Agreement the amount of the estimate on the next page hereof.
2. Author's corrections made on printed proof and small type shall be charged extra, at per printer's invoice.
3. The published price shall be                      , and the Publishers shall forthwith put the work into type and shall

produce and publish it within \_\_\_\_\_ months of the last sheet being passed for press.

4. A sum not exceeding £ \_\_\_\_\_ shall be spent in advertising the work.

(The Author has power to arrange his own advertising direct with the papers, should he desire it.)

Announcements shall be included in the Publishers' advertisements, and in the absence of specific instructions from the Author, shall be inserted in such publications as the Publishers may decide. It is understood that such announcements shall be charged at the advertising scale rates of the various publications in which the advertisement appears according to the space occupied, plus a commission of 5 per cent. An additional charge of One Guinea is made by the Publishers for insertion in their Catalogues. The Publishers will submit to the Author for approval a list of the papers they suggest advertising in and the cost in detail if desired.

5. Not exceeding \_\_\_\_\_ copies shall be given to the Press for Review.

(The List to be submitted to the Author, if desired.)

6. The Publishers shall account for copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12) at two-thirds of the published price less a commission of 15 per cent, but when copies are sold with the Author's consent at less than the above rates the Publishers shall account to the Author for them at the net price received less a commission of 15 per cent.
7. Accounts of Sales, made up to December 31st in each year, shall be rendered and paid on April 30th following, but an approximate account of Sales up to June 30th will, on written application, be rendered and paid on September 30th following.
8. After the lapse of two years from the date of publication the Publishers shall be at liberty either to return the stock to the Author or to sell it off as a remainder, at the option of the Author. In the event of the Author failing to exercise such option within one calendar month from the dispatch of written notice from the Publishers to his last known address, the Publishers shall be at liberty to dispose of the remainder of the stock as they may deem fit. If it is sold off, the Publishers shall pay to the Author the proceeds, less 15 per cent commission.
9. The Publishers may hold the stock, including moulds, MSS., pictures and other material from which to illustrate the said book or work, at any or all of the following places, viz., the printers', binders' and publishers' works and warehouses, and

the Publishers shall not be held accountable in respect of any copies of the said work in quires or bound, or for moulds, MSS., pictures and other material as aforesaid, which may be injured or destroyed by or by reason of Fire, or for accidental damage thereto or loss thereof in the absence of negligence on the part of the Publishers or their employees, either during production or on or after publication, or in transit, and the Publishers may do up only what is necessary for immediate wants and sales, binding the balance of the edition as required.

10. The Publishers shall be entitled to debit the Author's account with any warehousing charges incurred, provided that such charges shall not exceed the scale rates fixed by the Book-binders' and Printers' Associations.
11. The Publishers will take out a Fire Policy for the Author, at the Author's cost, on receiving specific instructions from the Author to do so.
12. The Publishers give the Author no guarantee of securing copyright in the United States of America, but should the Publishers sell to the U.S.A. rights, stereotypes, or electro-plates, they shall pay to the Author the net profits of such sales, less a commission of 20 per cent, but on copies bound or in quires so sold they shall pay to the Author the gross proceeds less a commission of 15 per cent.
13. The entire management of the production, publication, and sale of the said literary work shall be in the hands of the Publishers, who will promote its sale through all the ordinary trade channels free of any charge to the Author.
14. The Publishers do not undertake to send out copies of the work on sale or return, and copies if so sent at the Author's request shall be at the Author's risk.
15. The Author guarantees to the Publishers that the said work is in no way whatever a violation of any existing copyright, and that it contains nothing of a libellous or scandalous character, and he and his legal representatives will indemnify the Publishers from all suits, claims, proceedings, damages and costs which may be made, taken or incurred by or against them on the ground that the work is an infringement of copyright, or contains anything libellous or scandalous,

548 COMPLETE WRITING FOR PROFIT  
ESTIMATE.

| Type  | Size of Book | Number of copies |
|---|--------------|------------------|
| .....   |              |                  |
| Estimated number of pages                               |              |                  |
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| Paper   | Binding      |                  |
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| Putting into type, providing paper, machining           |              |                  |
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| same, binding copies as above, and Publication          |              |                  |
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AS WITNESS the hands of the Parties :

This agreement provides (Clause 1) for payment by the author of a lump sum, but provision might reasonably be made for payment by instalments. This would be a safeguard for the author, in that he could thereby ensure the publisher fulfilling his part of the bargain. Part of the payment might thus be paid on signature of the agreement, a further sum on passing of the proofs, and the balance on day of publication. Most publishers would be willing to accept such an arrangement, for they do not usually pay their bills in advance. On the other hand, the publisher may not be willing to embark on the enterprise without payment in advance from the author, and, having some experience of the unbusinesslike ways of some authors, I can sympathise with this point of view.

As in the case of the profit-sharing agreement, a more definite time limit should be set for publication (although as an author I should not object to the present clause in dealing with Allen & Unwin or any other good firm). In Clause 4, provision should be made for inclusion of the title free of charge in the publisher's catalogues. Clause 6 again provides for the reckoning of thirteen copies as twelve. This increases the 15 per cent commission and is no longer justified, in my opinion. Booksellers are sometimes supplied with thirteen copies, paying the publisher for twelve, but the practice is no longer general and the survival of this reckoning is obviously disadvantageous to the author.

Clauses might be added providing (1) that the author should receive six, or twelve, copies of the book on publication, and that the publisher should supply him with any further copies he may require for personal use only, that

is, not for sale, and (2) that the author should be able to terminate the agreement after a specified period and on giving due notice of his intention.

Let us now examine a royalty agreement for a non-fiction book. Reminiscences, biographies, travel books and other works of a general nature are generally published at what is known as a "library" price, the chief demand for such books being through the medium of the lending libraries. The published price is usually fixed at a figure between 10s. 6d. and 30s. As the circulation of many non-fiction books is virtually restricted to the libraries, publishers have shown an increasing tendency to inflate their published prices (with consequent benefit both to themselves and the authors, whose royalty is based on the published price) because practically as many copies of a "library" book published at, say, 15s., can be sold as one at 10s. 6d. The libraries, however, have lately revolted against unduly high-priced books, for the same reason. It is a fallacy to suppose that the cheaper the published price the greater will be the sale. It is sometimes difficult to convince authors that the question of publication price is often governed by library conditions. In all such discussions the experienced publisher should be listened to with respect, for he is familiar with prevailing conditions and the author usually is not.

The agreement I reproduce below was made for a volume of reminiscences by a lady well known in society. It may be taken as fairly representative of the terms which can be arranged for books of this kind which treat of famous people at first-hand. As much depends on the position and reputation of the author as on the nature and interest of the book itself.



MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this                      day  
of        19        , BETWEEN                      (hereinafter  
called the Author) of the one part AND  
(hereinafter called the Publishers) of the other part  
WHEREBY it is agreed as follows respecting a work written  
by the Author at present entitled :

“ REMINISCENCES ”

1. The Publishers shall have the exclusive licence to publish the said work in volume form in the English language throughout the British Empire excepting Canada subject to the conditions following :
2. The Publishers shall publish the said work within six months of the date of this agreement at a published price of about £1 1s. (one guinea) net in the first instance unless otherwise agreed by mutual consent of the parties hereto.
3. The Author hereby warrants to the Publishers that the said work is in no way whatever a violation of any existing copyright and that it contains nothing obscene, indecent or (with the intention of the Author) libellous and will indemnify the Publishers against any loss, injury or damage, including any legal costs or expenses properly incurred, occasioned to or incurred by the Publishers in consequence of any breach (unknown to the Publishers) of this warranty. And it is hereby further agreed that in the following cases any loss, injury or damage (including any legal costs or expenses as aforesaid) occasioned to or incurred by either the Author or the Publishers or both shall be contributed to and borne and paid by the Author and the Publishers in equal shares namely :
  - (a) Where any matter contained in the said work shall be held to constitute a libel upon a person to whom it shall appear the Author did not intend to refer.
  - (b) Where an unsuccessful action is brought in respect of an alleged libel contained in the said work, and
  - (c) Where any proceedings are threatened, instituted or prosecuted for any alleged libel contained in the said work and the claim is settled before judgment with the consent of the Author and the Publishers,

4. In consideration hereof the Publishers agree to pay the Author royalty on copies of the work, sold in volume form (reckoning twelve copies as twelve) at the following rates :
  - (a) 20% (twenty per cent) of the published price of all copies sold of the original high-priced English edition up to 1,500 (one thousand five hundred) copies and 25% (twenty-five per cent) on all copies so sold over and above 1,500 (one thousand five hundred).
  - (b) A royalty of 10% (ten per cent) of the published price of all copies sold in the Colonies or Dependencies (except Canada).
  - (c) A royalty of 10% (ten per cent) of the published price of all copies sold of any cheaper edition published at less than half the original English published price.
  - (d) A sum of £500 (five hundred pounds) on the day of publication of the said work in advance and on account of the foregoing royalties.
5. When the demand for the work has evidently ceased the Publishers shall be at liberty to dispose of the remainder at remainder price which shall not be subject to royalties but when sold above cost the Author shall be entitled to 10% (ten per cent) of the net proceeds of the copies sold. The Author shall have the option of purchasing such copies at the remainder price.
6. All details as to the manner of production, publication and advertisement and the number and destination of free copies shall be left to the discretion of the Publishers who shall bear all expenses in connection therewith.
7. The Author shall receive on publication six presentation copies of the said work and shall be entitled to purchase further copies for personal use but not for resale at two-thirds of the published price.
8. Accounts for royalty shall be made up half-yearly to the 30th day of April and the 31st day of October and shall be rendered and settled as soon after those dates each year as practicable, but in any case not later than three months thereafter respectively.
9. The Author shall be free to arrange with any other Publisher after two years from the date of first British publication or

sooner by mutual consent of the parties hereto for the re-issue of the said work in any form at a less or higher price than that covered by the Publishers of the first British edition but the said Publishers of the first British edition shall first be given the option for three months after receiving notice in writing to do so of themselves bringing out such new editions as the Author desires.

10. If the said work be allowed to go out of print to the extent of the Publishers having less than one dozen copies in stock and they neglect to issue a new edition of the said work within six months of having received written notice thereof then in either of these cases all rights under this agreement shall revert to the Author without further procedure and without prejudice to royalties and other monies due to her from the Publishers.
11. If payment should not be made by the Publishers of monies due or statements delivered to the Author as agreed herein within three months after the date of a written demand from the Author or her representatives for such payment then this agreement shall be considered as cancelled and all rights in the said work granted in this agreement shall revert to the Author forthwith and without further procedure.
12. All dramatic, cinematograph, serial, translation and other rights not specifically granted in this agreement are reserved by the Author.
13. The Author agrees to supply the Publishers with about illustrations suitable for reproduction in the said work and to obtain all necessary consents to the reproduction of the same therein, it being understood that such illustrations are to be free of copyright fees or payments for rights of reproduction by the Publishers whatsoever.
14. The Publishers shall not issue any cheaper edition of the said work or sell any copies as remainders within two years of first publication by them without the previous sanction of the Author.

This is a fairly representative agreement for a volume of reminiscences and does not call for much comment.

Clause 1 defines the publisher's licence and territory ; Clause 2 provides for publication within a stated time and at a certain price (the reservation should be noted, for changed conditions sometimes make it desirable or necessary to agree later on a different published price) ; Clause 3 is the libel clause already examined. The royalty scale (clause 4) should be noted. Higher royalties are practicable on books sold at a high price. Fifteen per cent is a fair commencing royalty on a book by an author not very well known ; in this case it began at 20 per cent. The colonial and cheap edition royalties are on a lower scale, for reasons already given. All the remaining clauses are similar to those dealt with in our discussion of the royalty agreement for a novel, with the exception of Clause 13, which is self-explanatory. It will be noted that the publisher requires illustrations to be supplied free of cost, the author thus being liable for payment of copyright fees, if any. For his part, the publisher bears the additional cost of making the blocks. The number and nature of illustrations required depend of course on the type of book ; a travel book, for example, usually needing more illustrations than reminiscences.

The advance on a general book, as well as the scale of royalties, depends on the market value of the book in question. It is perhaps worth repeating that this is in practice determined as much by the author's reputation as by the contents. An autobiography, generally speaking, is more valuable than a biography of the same subject. Books on subjects already covered by other authors naturally are worth less (at any rate in advance) than books on new subjects ; and the extent of the public's interest in any particular subject cannot often be

accurately estimated by anyone outside the publishing business, which is in close touch with the tastes and prejudices of that relatively small section of the public which reads and buys books.

Agreements should be stamped, as required by law, with the Inland Revenue stamp. Authors who neglect this precaution may find themselves liable to monetary penalties if it is necessary to prove the validity of the document. The submission of the signed and dated document to Somerset House within fourteen days of the date of execution is necessary; a good literary agent attends to this as a matter of course. For ordinary agreements the stamp duty is 6d.

American agreements, both for fiction and general books, contain substantially the same provisions as British agreements. The territory normally covered by the American publisher is the United States, sometimes with the addition of Canada. Until recent years Canada was included in American agreements as a matter of course. Although part of the British Empire, the territorial proximity of Canada enabled American publishers to exploit the Canadian market more effectively than English publishers. It used, moreover, to be true that many Canadian booksellers preferred American-made books—a preference which no longer appears to be general. Many English publishers have made strenuous and in some cases successful efforts to capture the Canadian market, with the result that Canada is now often included in English contracts. A development of the future will undoubtedly be the separate publication of books in Canada by Canadian publishers; a movement already inaugurated by the Ryerson Press and the Macmillan Company of Canada.

Although at the present time the Canadian book-buying public is relatively small and only books of outstanding importance can be issued in a separate Canadian edition, the number of books so published is slowly increasing, and authors will no doubt be able eventually to make independent contracts with Canadian publishers.

In cases where Canada is included in British contracts, the usual Colonial royalties apply to copies sold to Canada ; and American publishers usually pay half the royalty payable on the American edition.

American royalties are invariably on a lower scale than the percentages paid by English publishers. The higher cost of production, advertising and distribution are responsible for this. On the other hand, published prices (on which the royalty percentage is based) are generally higher. American novels are published at \$2.50 or \$2.00 ; general books at \$3.50 and upwards. In the hope of widening the market for books certain American publishers are now\* experimenting with the publication of fiction at \$1, but the result of the venture is still in doubt. If successful, the plan will no doubt be generally adopted and the cheaper book movement may spread later to this country.

Another consideration for the author who may be looking ruefully at his lower American royalties is the consolation of probably bigger sales than his book will achieve in the British Empire. The lending library system is still undeveloped in the U.S.A. In the case of a first novel most English publishers are satisfied with a sale of a thousand copies, but anything less than three thousand is disappointing to an American publisher.

The development of the Book of the Month Club, the Literary Guild and similar organisations in the U.S.A. has led to the addition of special clauses to publishing contracts providing for reduced royalties to the author in the event of the publisher supplying large quantities to one of these bodies (or any organisation dealing on a large scale) at a special price. Here is a specimen clause :

If the said work shall be selected by the " Book of the Month Club " or any similar organisation for circulation amongst its subscribers the royalty payable on copies sold in respect thereof shall be as follows :

- (a) That on all copies of the said work which the Publishers may sell to the Union News Company or any other news company at half or less than half of the said published price, the Publishers shall pay to the Proprietors royalties calculated at half of the above-mentioned rates.
- (b) That in the case of copies of the said work which the Publishers may sell to the Book of the Month Club or the Literary Guild of America, they shall pay to the Proprietors a royalty of 40% (forty per cent) of all amounts received by them from such sales provided always that the Publishers shall be at liberty before calculating the Proprietors' royalty to deduct from the said amounts the net cost of manufacture of the copies so sold.
- (c) That in the case of copies of the said work which the Publishers may sell to any recognised book club, other than those mentioned in (b) of this agreement, they shall pay to the Proprietors a royalty 7½% (seven and one-half per cent) of the said published price.

Similar clauses have been added to British agreements since the inauguration of the Book Society in this country. The reduced royalty is justified, because the publishers are obliged to sell copies at a cut rate. The author

gains by the increased sale, not to mention the publicity and indirect benefit to be derived from such arrangements.

The cheap edition situation in America requires explanation. It is not customary for American publishers to issue cheap editions (although there are exceptions), the usual arrangement being a lease of the cheap rights to one of the big American firms which specialise in popular reprints. The proceeds from the transfer of cheap rights are usually divided equally between author and publisher.

To conclude this survey of publishing contracts, I will quote Mr. Stanley Unwin once again. "An unfavourable agreement with an honourable firm is at all times to be preferred to an impeccable agreement with an unscrupulous one." To that I would add, the ability of a publisher to sell an author's book is a consideration quite as important as any clause in the contract. A reputable and enterprising publisher is worth more to an author than an extra 5 per cent or a string of protective clauses in his contract. By all means let us have the best contracts we can get ; but it is as well to realise that a watertight contract is not the magic instrument by which an author can infallibly achieve success. Above all, let the author remember that by signing an agreement he is going into partnership with his publisher.



## CHAPTER VIII

### COPYRIGHT

OF all the subjects about which authors generally are woefully ignorant, copyright is entitled to first place. Very few authors understand even the elementary principles of copyright, and fewer still have any knowledge of the legal aspect of this important subject. It is true that for practical purposes nothing beyond elementary knowledge is either necessary or desirable. The whole question of copyright bristles with legal complications.

Copyright, as its name implies, means the right to copy, or to reproduce. To quote one authority,\* "in its specific application it means the right to multiply copies of those products of the human brain known as literature and art." To these might be added music. To quote further : " Copyright may be defined as the sole and exclusive liberty of multiplying copies of an original work or composition, or in other words, the right of reproducing in a printed form. There is but one copyright in a literary work, and that one copyright covers all serial, book, dramatic, cinematographic or other rights of every kind."

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\* *Copyright Condensed and Explained*, by Lewis C. Russell (Jarrolds 1s. 6d.).

The importance of retaining the copyright will therefore be readily seen. It is not necessary to part with the copyright in order to produce a work in book or any other form, as the author has the power to grant a licence to publish, and such licence can, as we have seen, readily be defined and limited under the terms of the contract.

Copyright is liable to affect an author in two ways. He may commit a breach of copyright himself by infringing someone else's rights ; or someone may infringe his. The former is in a sense more immediately important. In the event of anyone infringing an author's copyright, his only remedy is a legal one, so that beyond placing the facts of the case in a solicitor's hands, he can do little more than act on legal advice. But it is very important that he should not unwittingly commit any technical offence himself.

I use the word " unwittingly " because it is obvious that the deliberate plagiarist is not likely to be influenced by any word of warning. He is probably aware of the risk he is taking, and is presumably ready to pay the penalty if discovered.

The most important elementary distinction which must be drawn is that there is no copyright in *facts*, but that there is copyright in the method of their presentation. If a racehorse is a bay gelding standing sixteen hands high, aged five years, winner of certain races, anybody is at perfect liberty to make these statements in print. But it is not permissible to copy word for word the stylish description another writer may have indulged in. This would be infringing his copyright.

In the case of fiction or any work of imagination, copyright exists in the *expression* of an idea (though

strictly not in the idea itself) as well as in the author's style. But you need not be afraid of unwittingly following in the tracks of another writer who has had the same inspiration, let us say, for the plot of a story. It is extremely unlikely that such duplication will be followed by any legal action, and, even if it were, it must be remembered that the aggrieved party, in order to establish his case, has to *prove* that you had previously read his story. There have been many astonishing coincidences of this kind, in which there cannot possibly have been any intentional plagiarism. In fiction particularly, when ideas for plots are so often based on happenings in real life, two or more writers following the same line of thought may easily arrive at more or less the same method of presentation.

Quotation from another's work, provided it is not of unreasonable length and that the source is duly acknowledged, is a recognised custom and would rarely be held to constitute a breach of copyright, but it is generally advisable to obtain permission beforehand from the owner of the copyright.

English copyright is governed at present by the Act of 1911, which gives the author (or the owner of the copyright) the power to publish in any way a particular work ; by printing in book form or in magazine or newspaper ; to convert a non-dramatic work into a dramatic work and vice versa ; to make records or rolls or whatever may be necessary to mechanical production of the work : in short, to " publish " the work in any way within the territory indicated in the Copyright Act, or such countries as have a reciprocal arrangement with Great Britain.

The period covered by our own Act is the author's

life and fifty years afterwards (with a few exceptions), so it will be seen how very important it is that an author should not give up absolute control of his rights. The protection afforded in this way by the other countries indicated is subject to the Copyright Laws in force in each particular country, and copyright under the British Act becomes operative automatically for writers living in the Colonies.

The possession of certain rights, in literary property as in anything else, indicates that the possessor has power to defend those rights, and to demand compensation if those rights are infringed. To quote the Act of 1911, "Copyright in a work shall be deemed to be infringed by any person who, without the consent of the owner of the copyright, does anything the sole right to do which is by this Act conferred on the owner of the copyright ; Provided"—and there follows a description of exceptions to this rule ; such as reviewing, or newspaper summary, inclusion of a certain amount of material in books for schools, lectures, etc.

Since the Act was framed a new method of publication has sprung up, viz., broadcasting, and this is covered by the provision guarding against the reading or recitation in public by one person of any reasonable extract from any published work.

When the copyright in a work has been infringed in any way the owner of the copyright has certain clearly defined remedies, and it behoves such owner to take immediate steps to protect his rights as soon as possible after learning of any such infringement.

It is impossible to give more than a brief outline of an author's rights under this heading ; indeed, it is probably

unnecessary. All that the author need bother about in the first place is to look out for any unauthorised use of his works, and if he finds any to consult someone who can give him sound legal advice as to his position. There are many people qualified to give this advice, such as the Secretary of the Incorporated Society of Authors.

Of course, this does not mean that an author should not know something about the value of the work which he has created. On the contrary, he would be well advised to become acquainted with the general principles of the Copyright Act, certainly before he ventures far on his literary career. The point is that unless he has a natural aptitude for such things, he would probably be more profitably employed in creative work than struggling to cope with the intricacies of a legal document upon which even experts hold varying views. Since this work is intended for the use of the beginner in literature as well as the experienced writer it would perhaps be as well to leave this point as it stands, for the longer one labours it to the novice, the more confused he is likely to become.

The protection afforded by the Copyright Act of 1911 extends to most of the British Dominions and Colonies and, as indicated earlier in this chapter, such countries as have a reciprocal agreement with Great Britain. This arrangement covers most of the European countries and certain States in other parts of the world. The most notable exception, perhaps, is the United States of America, which country has its own Copyright Law at present, though this disability may shortly be abolished.

But for the moment let us keep to our own Act. In the first place, English copyright does not depend upon

any formalities for its existence, but comes automatically into being with the creation of a particular work, be it short story, poem, novel, treatise, literary, musical or artistic work of any description. So far as literary works are concerned, the formalities begin with the publication of the work. Prior to the present Act registration was necessary to protect the copyright of a work, but the 1911

has done away with that. What is necessary, however, is that on publication the publisher must send a copy of the best edition (unbound proofs are not accepted) to the British Museum. The four University Libraries (Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin) have the right to demand a copy of the work, but they must exercise this right within twelve months of the date of publication. Supplying copies to these University Libraries used to be compulsory, but the new arrangement is now in force.

The procedure for protecting the copyright of an American book in England is the same, except that a copy of the work must be exposed for sale *if* the said work is not actually published in England on or before the particular day on which a copy is sent to the British Museum. This "exposure for sale" constitutes publication, and is really the important part in copyrighting any work in this country.

The date of depositing a copy of an American book and exposing it for sale is important. To secure copyright in the British Empire and in all those countries signatory to the Berne Convention, it is <sup>is</sup> necessary to deposit the copies on the *same* day that the book is published in America. If copyright in the British Empire only is required, then thirteen days' grace <sup>is</sup> <sub>is</sub> the date

of American publication is allowed. If copies are not sent within that time, copyright is technically lost.

It is not generally known that the British Museum does not concern itself with protecting the copyright of a work. Its function is merely to serve as a National Library for the benefit of the general public, where copies of any literary work may be read.

The only safe way by which an author can protect the copyright in his work is to have it registered at Stationers' Hall. To effect this a copy of the work must be sent to the Registrar, together with a form of application, and on payment of a fee of 10s. 6d. a stamped certificate is sent to the author or owner of the copyright which the author can subsequently produce if necessary in any court of law as evidence of his ownership in the copyright of the said work. It should be noted that the receipt given by the British Museum is in no way an evidence of ownership, and would not be accepted as such in the Courts. The time for delivery of the copy of the work is immaterial, but it is obviously an advantage to have this done as early as possible. Stationers' Hall is no longer controlled by any Statute and is a purely private company. The British Museum, partly owing to lack of space and also because preference is given only to those books likely to be of literary value, refuses to accept anything that is not strictly literary. Stationers' Hall however, will accept trade journals, trademarks, paintings sketches, and so forth.

A special word of caution may be given here to authors who write for magazines or periodicals. The Act assigns the author the copyright of anything which appears in any such publication—apart from such publication—

unless a definite agreement is made conceding the copyright to the publisher or proprietor of the periodical. Therefore the author should carefully note what kind of receipt he is asked to sign in return for payment ; or he may find that he has unwittingly parted with all his rights in the work. This may seem a small point, but it precludes the author from publishing that particular piece of work anywhere else without the permission of the party to whom he has sold his rights. In the case of a serial story this may very well prove a considerable loss to the author ; even short stories have a recurrent value in future years.

Second serial rights, film and dramatic rights (the former especially) are often potentially valuable. Therefore the author should pay careful attention to the disposal of his work. For example, when submitting a short story to a magazine, he should, in his accompanying letter, specifically offer "first British serial rights"—which is all the fair-minded editor or proprietor usually expects to acquire. Some publications, taking advantage of the young author's complete ignorance, either offer to buy "all rights" in the story or, worse still, pay for it with a printed endorsement receipt (usually in small type) on the back of the cheque, which reads something like this, "To copyright and all other author's rights of and in——" (then the title of the story). Sometimes it pays an author, especially an absolute beginner, to grin and bear it—and sign. No magazine likes quarrelsome contributors, even when they are in the right. But the author should at any rate know what he is doing.

An Order in Council extends the provision of Copyright Act of 1911 to American authors, as tho



they were British subjects, and under the same conditions.

The American Copyright Act of 1909 is on a rather different footing. The main feature is that works must be manufactured in the United States and registered at the Library of Congress, Washington. The term of copyright granted is 28 years, which can be renewed for a further period of 28 years on the application of the author one year before the expiration of the first term.

English authors can get their books protected on the same terms, provided that publication in the two countries is "simultaneous." In order to allow for the difficulty in getting publication dates to synchronise, the American law permits an author to deposit and register a copy of the English edition of a book within 60 days of first publication (it used to be 30 days), thereby securing interim copyright. The protection thus obtained is retrospective to the date of first day of publication, and extends for four months from the date of registration. It is advisable to lodge such a copy for interim copyright as early as possible, as no proceedings, in the event of piracy, can be taken until the book has been registered.

If the book is then set up and printed in America before the expiration of the four months' period, copyright is obtained for 28 years—with the right of extension—and the book is as fully protected as is possible.

A new Copyright Bill is now under consideration in America which will go a long way towards equalising the positions of American and English authors. But there would be little use in giving it more than passing mention in its present embryo state.

## CHAPTER IX

### PRODUCING AND MARKETING A BOOK

It is now necessary to describe briefly the process of publishing a book. Outside the publishing world itself, complete ignorance seems to prevail as to the procedure of book publication. An elementary explanation will therefore not be out of place, although many who read this book will be thoroughly familiar with publishing processes.

As soon as a book has been accepted the approximate date of publication is decided upon. This decision usually rests with the publisher, although the author's wishes are often consulted. The contract, as we have seen, usually provides for a six months' time limit.

The actual publication date is sometimes of considerable importance. When fewer books were produced the spring and the autumn were the recognised publishing seasons, but the disappearance of seasonal publication, although it is still adhered to by some of the older houses, is a sign of the times. The summer months, which used to be a close season for books, now see the production of many books of the first importance. Especially is true of novels. Every year now, novels by many know novelists are published during the summer.

This is common sense as opposed to publishing tradition, for probably as many, if not more, novels are read in the holiday months as at any other period of the year. But there is another sound reason for being published in the comparatively slack season. There is less competition. The fewer "latest novels" there are, the more selling opportunity there is for a new novel. There is, too, a minor practical consideration. When printers and binders are not so busy they can give more time and attention to the details of a book's production.

The production of a book begins when the manuscript is sent to the printers to be "set up." Most publishing firms have their regular printers; some, on account of the large number of books they produce, employ several printing firms. Some even have their own printing works.

When the printer receives the manuscript he usually furnishes the publisher with a detailed estimate of the costs of composition, machining, etc., which enables the publisher to check his own estimate. The manuscript goes to the composing-room, where, after the size of the page, margins, etc., has been decided, it is divided up among several compositors.

It is important that authors should realise what happens to their manuscript when it gets into the printers' hands. If a MS. has been bound up it has to be ripped open and divided into sections. It is, as we have noted already, a great convenience to the printer if a manuscript has a removable cover, or if the pages can be readily separated; and it is also desirable that the pages should be numbered consecutively throughout, and not chapter by chapter.

Thus different sections of the book are put into type

## SPECIMEN PROOF

" IN the world of print, the revival of the Masters of the Fifteenth Century is an event which claims, not the <sup>3</sup>appreciation <sup>4</sup>only <sup>2</sup>of all Book-lovers and Collectors but the particular interest of the the Printer whose single aim, amidst the chaos of BOOK-WORK, has been to set before the Public something worthy of the Fathers of Typography.

Without fear of contradiction the Firm of The Anchor Press, Ltd., Tiptree, Essex, would state that the Production and Appreciation of Fine Print is an Art that may be only acquired by experience and endeavour, the authority for which statement is based on the reputation gained since the business was established in 1899. 147

Time, an incontestable witness, presents the Truth. In support of the foregoing the Firm is prepared to tender advice on all matters appertaining to Print, selection of types, taste in setting, etc., with one object in view—the production of a Beautiful Book which shall be in keeping with their work of the past and with the ideals of those Print Pioneers of earlier centuries. 148

## CORRECTED PROOF

"IN the World of Print, the revival of the Masters of the Fifteenth Century is an event which claims not only the appreciation of all Book-lovers and Collectors but the particular interest of the Printer whose single aim, amidst the chaos of modern book-work, has been to place before the Public something worthy of the Fathers of Typography.

Without fear of contradiction the **Firm of The Anchor Press, Ltd., Tiptree, Essex**, would state that the *Production* and *Appreciation* of Fine Print is an Art that may be acquired only by long experience and true endeavour, the authority for which statement is based on the reputation which has resulted from the high standard of work produced since the business was established in 1899. Time, an incontestable witness, presents the Truth.

In support of the foregoing the Firm is prepared to tender advice on all matters appertaining to Print: *selection of types, taste in setting*, etc., with one object in view—the production of a BEAUTIFUL BOOK which shall be in keeping with their work of the past and with the ideals of those Print Pioneers of earlier centuries.”<sup>4</sup>

simultaneously. The lines of type are placed by the compositor into a shallow container called a galley, which holds about 15 in. to 20 in. of type, *i.e.*, the equivalent of three or four printed pages. As the galleys are completed, proofs or "pulls" are taken. These proofs are known as "galley" or slip proofs. These are first corrected by the printers' readers, who check the proofs strictly by the "copy," or original manuscript.

It is customary for most publishers to send proofs (in duplicate) to the author. One set of proofs bears the printer's corrections and queries, and is stamped or labelled with the request that this set should receive the additional corrections of the author and be returned to the publisher as quickly as possible. The other set is for the author to keep for reference.

### DEFINITION OF MARKS

1. Where a letter or word is to be changed from small letters to capitals, three lines should be drawn under it, and the word *caps.* written in the margin. This is frequently done to give importance to the subject.
2. A letter is upside down.
3. Where a wrong letter appears, a line should be drawn through it, and the right letter written in the margin.
4. When words are to be transposed there are three ways of marking, but usually numbers are not employed unless more than three words are affected.
5. Where a letter of different size of face appears a line should be drawn through it, and *w.f.* written in the margin.
6. A hyphen is to be inserted.
7. To take away a superfluous letter or word the pen is through it, and a Greek  $\delta$  (delta) written opposite.

8. A word is to be inserted. Note that the instances here given strengthen the argument.
9. Where a word is to be changed from small capitals to small letters a line is to be drawn under it, and *l.c.* written in the margin. This decreases the value of the word in its relation to the argument.
10. Where it is desired to substitute a more suitable word, a line should be drawn through the original, and the other written in the margin.
11. When a word, phrase, sentence, or name is of special importance, a wavy line should be drawn under it, and the word *Clar.* (Clarendon=bold type) written in the margin.
12. To give a degree of importance to the statement or name, a straight line should be drawn under and the word *ital.* (italics) written in the margin.
13. Where it is necessary to make an insertion which is too long to be placed in the margin, it may be written either at the top or bottom of the folio. In the present case the insertion presents a more detailed and truer statement.
14. When a paragraph commences where it is not intended, a line should be drawn to connect the matter, and the words *run on* written in the margin.
15. Where it is intended to start a new paragraph, either of three marks may be employed, as shown.
16. A space has been omitted between two words.
17. One punctuation mark replaces another. If the substitute is a colon or a full-point, the correction should be encircled.
18. Where a word, phrase, or sentence is to be changed from small letters to small capitals two straight lines should be drawn under it, and *s.c.* written in the margin. This conveys to the reader its relative importance to the argument.
19. When words or lines are not straight (bad alignment), mark as shown.
20. Where a word has been struck out, and it is subsequently decided that it shall remain, dots should be made under it and the word *stet* (Latin=let it stand) written in the margin. This becomes necessary, as may be seen in the

example here given, where it is impossible to find more suitable words with which to convey the idea.

21. Where a space or quadrat appears, a line should be drawn under it and a strong perpendicular line drawn in the margin.
22. When it is desired to draw the letters of a word closer together, mark as shown.
23. Where an apostrophe is needed, or turned commas to designate extracts, mark as shown.

The corrections of the printer's reader should be copied by the author on the blank set of proofs, in addition to his own corrections. This will enable him to keep a record of the precise amount of corrections he has made, for it is customary for the publisher (as we have seen) to debit author's corrections in excess of a certain amount against the author's account. The errors made by the printers themselves are not, of course, included, but it is just as well, in case of dispute, for the author to preserve a record, which shows which were the printer's and which author's corrections.

It often happens that the printer's reader has occasion to "query" a point in the text. It may be an obvious slip, a misquotation, a fault of grammar or style, an omission or redundancy—in fact any point which strikes him as doubtful. His instructions are to check the proofs by the "copy" and if the "copy" is wrong he can only query it, which he does by inserting the letters "Qy." in the margin opposite the doubtful word or passage which he underlines. The author should take particular note of these queries, which are often valuable, since they draw attention to points which the author himself may well have overlooked. Printer's readers are, as a class, very well read and intelligent, and their comments should



receive careful attention. Some inexperienced authors are inclined to resent the queries of the proof-reader, but he is almost invariably right, and anyone who has had any association with printers' readers cannot fail to appreciate the value of their queries. It is seldom that any doubtful point escapes them.

Whichever way a query is decided, the author should be careful to mark it through clearly—usually with a tick, thus ✓—before returning the proofs. If this is not done the compositor is left without instructions when he has to work on the corrected proofs.

Young authors seemingly find it hard to understand that every correction they make after the letterpress has been set up in type *costs money*. Even the deletion of a letter or a word at the end of a paragraph takes up the compositor's time ; and apparently simple corrections sometimes involve the resetting of a whole paragraph. To delete, for instance, a few words from a sentence in the middle of a long paragraph may involve the dislocation of every line of type in that paragraph, which means that every line has to be rearranged.

The question of author's corrections is so important that, as we have seen, a clause in the contract provides that the author should bear the cost of excessive corrections. But, apart from the financial aspect, authors who indulge in too lavish corrections are a positive nuisance to the publisher. Heavy and unnecessary corrections probably spell delay and the publisher's schedule may be upset accordingly. Also, the author in such cases is apt to dispute the sum debited to his account in respect of excessive corrections, and both publisher and printer may be put to a lot of trouble in satisfying the irate author

that the charge is correct. Many unfortunate quarrels have arisen in this way, simply because authors are ignorant of the fact that corrections are expensive.

When the author returns his corrected proofs the corrections are duly carried out in type. The procedure of different publishers naturally varies. Some embody their printer's readers corrections in type before proofs are submitted to the author. Other publishers do not send galley proofs at all, but wait till a later stage, when page proofs are available.

The type in the galleys is then measured off and separated into page form. The number of the page, the title of the book and the chapter headings are added, and each page of type is placed in what is known as a forme, into which the type is locked and once more proofs are taken. Sometimes, but not always, these proofs are submitted to the author. None but absolutely necessary corrections should be made at this stage, as the dislocation of a line or two may now compel the rearrangement of several pages.

Meanwhile, the wrapper, or "jacket," as it is called, is in process of manufacture. The commercial significance of the wrapper is fully realised by most publishers, but the suggested design is often submitted to the author, together with a copy of the descriptive matter which most wrappers contain. Very often the author is invited to supply a paragraph descriptive of his book, which can be used for this purpose. Publishers generally are anxious that the various details of book production should please the author, and as the wrapper is an important item the author's co-operation is frequently invited.

Illustrations have to be dealt with separately, the

blocks for these being made independently by the publisher's engraver, and sent to the printers for insertion in the text. The utmost care is necessary in handling illustrations, but the various points which have to be decided, *e.g.*, the size of the different blocks, screen numbers, the system by which the printer is enabled to identify the blocks when they are placed in his hands—all these matters are almost invariably attended to by a department in the publisher's office, in whose hands the author can safely leave them.

The production of a book is largely a mechanical process. To the printer and blockmaker a book is so much metal, and measurements are the chief element in the actual manufacture of a book. The author should leave much to the discretion of his publisher, who, in his turn, relies to a considerable extent on the judgment of the printer. There are all kinds of printers, of course, but at its best printing is as much of an art as a science, and fortunate is the author who is published by a firm which produces tasteful books.

An author may—very often does—prefer a certain style of binding, or wish for certain points to be observed in his book's production. If he knows exactly what he wants, and provided that his requirements are practicable, he should communicate them to the publisher, who, as a rule, is glad to observe the author's wishes. But the author who has only a vague idea of what he wants should not interfere, for he will become unpopular.

A well-produced book is as satisfying to the discriminating eye as a shoddily made book is offensive. It takes a little more time and costs a little more to manufacture an attractive book, and perhaps the book-lover

is inclined to magnify the importance of tasteful production ; but, to consider the question from its reverse aspect, there is no excuse to-day for shoddy books. No one expects the seven-and-sixpenny library novel to be a work of art, but, until recently, the general standard of English book production was depressingly low. Following the war-time period, when paper, cloth, and good machinery were terribly scarce, the quality of book production fell to a very low level ; but to-day there are encouraging signs of improvement. Many English publishers have every reason to be proud of the high standard attained by their books. The houses of John Murray, Allen and Unwin, Jonathan Cape, Heinemann, Chatto and Windus, Faber and Faber, Harrap, John Lane, Martin Secker, Victor Gollancz, Geoffrey Bles, and others, are notable for the quality of their books.

The first step in the actual marketing of a book is the advance information supplied to the firm's travellers of its forthcoming publications. They are supplied with such details as will enable them to secure advance orders from the trade. The booksellers are usually canvassed a week or two before actual publication date, the travellers being supplied with special advance copies of the book and wrapper for the purpose. Very often the publisher will not give his actual printing order until he can tell roughly how many copies the trade will order in anticipation of publication. Copies of a book sold up to and including publication date are known as subscription sales.

Before actual publication date preliminary press advertisements are issued by most publishers and advance copies are sent to the leading papers for review. As the publisher likes to please the author if he can, the author's

co-operation is sometimes sought, in the matter of review copies especially, although the ordinary contract stipulates that all such details should be left to the publisher's discretion. And, usually, he is the better judge, as selling books happens to be his business. Press advertising and reviews are but means to an end from the publisher's point of view. And this brings us to an important point. What *does* sell books? Or, rather, what sells a book for which a demand has to be created?

At first sight the answer would appear to be simple. Most people not intimately connected with bookselling would probably say advertising. On more careful consideration they might add press reviews and the activity of the publisher's salesmen. No one can deny that all of these are contributing factors. But all who are concerned in the publication of books know that the problem is much more profound and mystifying. A publisher may discover what he, his readers, and all who read the manuscript or proofs consider a "winner." It is well produced; the time of publication—always an important point—is carefully chosen; the book is well advertised in advance; the travellers are imbued with enthusiasm; the trade is diligently circularised; and the book is ushered into the world under conditions as favourable as human effort can make them. A generous advertising campaign is launched; the critics praise the book; it is well displayed in the windows of bookshops—but, somehow or other, the reading public won't have it. It doesn't sell. The publisher may accelerate his efforts, spend more money advertising the book—all with negligible results.

On the other hand, a book may be published with none of these advantages. It is unheralded in the publisher's

advertisements, the reviewers ignore it, the trade often are unaware of its existence until the public begins to ask for it. The publisher, recording the growing demand with astonished satisfaction, realises he is entertaining an angel unawares. If he is a good business man he at once begins an energetic sales campaign and promptly invests in advertising; for "invest" is the right word to use. Bewildering? Of course it is. But it is constantly happening.

No one can tell how a book is going to sell. In the case of established authors, whose loyal public may be safely estimated to within a few thousands, there is not, of course, the same uncertainty. A book by an unknown author is, however, always a gamble. The fascination of publishing, lies, of course, in this huge element of chance. That is, I think, why so many bad books are published; the publishers will back loser after loser in the hope of one day spotting a real winner.

Books, like plays, are very uncertain quantities until their public appearance. Their success, from a sales point of view, is not, however, to be measured by their quality. Good books don't sell; bad books do, and very often. Public taste is absolutely mystifying. No one can pre-judge it. If there were anybody who could accurately forecast the fate of any manuscript he would be literally worth a fortune to any publisher. How can one individual determine the potential selling ability of a novel, for instance, when there are as many different grades of novels as there are readers? Who can say with absolute confidence what is going to appeal to even one section of the reading public?

It is tremendously difficult to judge the prospects of

a story manuscript. (Books of general or serious interest are obviously easier to assess and publishers rarely make mistakes with non-fiction books.) There is a host of classic "rejections" that afterwards turned out to be "best-sellers."

*Paddy The Next Best Thing*, *Tarzan of the Apes*, *Simon Called Peter*, *The Sheik*—all these and many other big successes among modern novels were rejected by many publishers before they were finally accepted. For three years Maeterlinck's play *The Blue Bird* is reported to have gone the rounds. That great money-spinner, *Charley's Aunt*, was rejected by nearly every manager in London. Rossini told Jenny Lind she would never be a singer; Sullivan didn't think Melba's voice good enough for the Savoy; Tree rejected *Peter Pan*; *Journey's End* went the rounds of West End managers. No one really knows what the public wants. Experience fails to teach us, and intuition is more often wrong than right.

Every publisher makes mistakes of this kind, but when he lets a book slip through his hands, only to see it prove a big commercial or artistic success in the hands of another publisher, it does not necessarily follow that there must be wailing and gnashing of teeth in the office. Admittedly, very few like to see their rival in business prosper by their own errors of judgment, but there is something to be said for the point of view of the publisher who said: "When anyone tells me of a masterpiece which we have rejected, I refuse to shed tears, for I always think that the book trade would be healthier if we publishers repented more for the rubbish that we so constantly publish, rather than for the gems of literature which the best of us occasionally reject."

Apart from the speculative aspect of publishing books, every author should know something of the procedure of publication and of the conditions which govern the selling of books. Although the publisher is in a sense his business partner, the author rarely knows anything about the publisher's job. So many authors regard publishers as a mysterious race, whose ways are beyond comprehension, that it is high time some light was usefully shed on the status, functions, and limitations of publishers generally.

It is unnecessary to emphasise the risks attached to publishing (I refer to the publication of books of general interest and fiction, especially the latter). Some publishers have more judgment, or flair, than others, and prosper accordingly; but the element of chance inseparable from trying to satisfy the public taste makes publishing a more than ordinarily hazardous occupation. There is much less risk—and incidentally much more profit—in publishing educational and technical books, but for the purpose of this brief survey we have been considering the "general" publisher.

The price of books is a subject of interest and importance to every author. The published price of a book directly affects both its sales and the author's royalty.

"The published price" (of the ordinary run of new books) says Mr. Stanley Unwin,\* "can be divided into three more or less equal parts, viz. :

- "1. The actual cost of manufacturing, *i.e.*, paper, printing, and binding.
- "2. The cost of distribution, *i.e.*, booksellers' discounts and travellers' commissions.

\* In *The Truth About Publishing*. (Allen & Unwin, 7s.



3. "The balance, which has to cover :
  - (a) Advertising ;
  - (b) The author's remuneration ;
  - (c) The publisher's working expenses ;
  - (d) The publisher's profit."

Roughly speaking, it costs between two and three times as much to manufacture a book to-day as it did before 1914. Printing, paper, and binding costs have all increased considerably. The cost of distribution has also advanced, the minimum discount demanded by the bookseller now averaging  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. Advertising is more expensive than ever. The author's royalty is calculated on the published price—an important point. To quote Mr. Unwin further : "The publisher's working expenses are extraordinarily high. It is not that publishers' businesses are extravagantly run ; most of them, I believe, are fairly economically run ; because at best the turnover is small compared with any staple commodity such as tea, *and the detailed work involved is out of all proportion.*" (The italics are mine.)

Yet, in spite of increased costs all round, the published price of the novel has not advanced in proportion. Before the war the 6s. novel was obtainable at the net retail price of 4s. 6d. ; to-day the standard net price is 7s. 6d., an increase of only about 66 per cent. Publishers are actually working on a smaller margin of profit. If any author doubts the statement, I refer him to Mr. Stanley Unwin's figures, which leave no room for doubt.

The following detailed estimates for the production of some different types of book will probably be of interest.

# 584 COMPLETE WRITING FOR PROFIT

Date  
 Title 7s. 6d. Novel.  
 No. Printed Pages—Letterpress 288  
 2,000

|                           |    |    |    |    | £  | s. | d. |
|---------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Composition               | .. | .. | .. | .. | 58 | 0  | 0  |
| Corrections               | .. | .. | .. | .. | 8  | 0  | 0  |
| Machining Text            | .. | .. | .. | .. | 23 | 0  | 0  |
| „ Colour Illustrations    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| „ Half-tone Illustrations |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| „ Frontispiece            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Paper—Text                | .. | .. | .. | .. | 23 | 5  | 0  |
| „ Illustrations           |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| „ Frontispiece            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Cover Design              |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| „ Blocks                  | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1  | 0  | 0  |
| Moulds                    | .. | .. | .. | .. | 13 | 0  | 0  |
| Stereos                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Electrotypes              |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Jacket                    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Artist                    | .. | .. | .. | .. | 5  | 5  | 0  |
| Blocks                    | .. | .. | .. | .. | 8  | 0  | 0  |
| Paper                     | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1  | 17 | 0  |
| Composition and Machining | .. | .. | .. | .. | 6  | 0  | 0  |
| Various                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

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£147 7 0

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Published price 7s. 6d.

Average selling price 4s. 9d.

|                           |    |    |    |    |   |    |
|---------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|----|
| Cost per Copy             | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1 | 5½ |
| O/H                       | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1 | 1½ |
| Binding                   | .. | .. | .. | .. |   | 7  |
| Folding and Gathering     | .. | .. | .. | .. |   |    |
| Royalty (say 10 per cent) | .. | .. | .. | .. |   | 9  |

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3 11½

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From the above estimate it will be seen that *on the first edition, and provided every copy is sold*, the publisher's

profit is the difference between 4s. 9d. (the average selling price to the trade) and 3s. 11½d., viz., 9¾d. But out of this 9¾d. the publisher has to pay for the advertising of the book. £50. which works out at 1s. a copy, is a modest sum to spend, and many publishers exceed it, so that they would actually *lose money* on the first edition. For subsequent editions the figures are radically different—there is no £58 to pay for composition, for instance—and the publisher may look forward to a reasonable profit.

In the above estimate, the publisher may actually lose money on Colonial sales, and his only hope of recouping himself lies in reprinting to supply a further demand.

Here are another publisher's figures.

7s. 6d. Novel, Cr. 8vo, 288 pp.  
Edition of 2,000 copies

|                       |    |    |    |    | £    | s. | d. |
|-----------------------|----|----|----|----|------|----|----|
| Composing, per 32 pp. | £7 | .. | .. | .. | 63   | 0  | 0  |
| Corrections           | .. | .. | .. | .. | 8    | 0  | 0  |
| Machining             | .. | .. | .. | .. | 21   | 12 | 0  |
| Paper, 70 lbs.        | .. | .. | .. | .. | 19   | 13 | 0  |
| Binding               | .. | .. | .. | .. | 54   | 3  | 4  |
| Binding Brasse:       | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1    | 0  | 0  |
| Jacket                |    |    |    |    |      |    |    |
| Artist                | .. | .. | .. | .. | 5    | 5  | 0  |
| Blocks                | .. | .. | .. | .. | 12   | 0  | 0  |
| Paper                 | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1    | 10 | 0  |
| Machining             | .. | .. | .. | .. | 6    | 5  | 0  |
|                       |    |    |    |    | £192 | 8  | 4  |

(Advertising charges not allowed for)

Thus the actual manufacturing cost works out at just over 1s. 11d. a copy, to which must be added:

|                                    | s. | d. |          |
|------------------------------------|----|----|----------|
| Overhead charges, minimum, say,    | 1  | 0  | per copy |
| Author's royalty (say 10 per cent) | 9  | "  | "        |
| .                                  | 1  | 9  | " "      |

which brings the cost per copy to over 3s. 8d. Allowing 1s. a copy for advertising, the total is 4s. 8d. And the publisher has to supply the bulk of the trade at about 4s. 9d. Thus, *provided he sells every copy of this edition of 2,000*, he makes a profit of about 1d. a copy, compared with the author's 9d. But on subsequent editions (if any) the balance restores itself.

It will be noted in the foregoing estimates that 288 pages have been allowed for, but novels of 320 pages, and longer, are quite common. Any increase in length adds to the publisher's manufacturing costs.

What are the average sales of a novel? Sales are an unknown quantity to most new authors, and some approximate figures may be of interest. For a first novel, anything over 1,000 copies sold of the 7s. 6d. edition may be considered good. A successful novel sells from about two to three thousand copies. The sales of many novels do not exceed 750 copies, and a considerable number sell less. The sales of established novelists vary from two to as many as fifty thousand. Anything from 5,000 to 10,000 copies may be regarded as a substantial success; and over 10,000 as an outstanding success. From thirty thousand onwards we are in the region of the "best-seller."

Publishers often incur an actual loss on the 7s. 6d. edition of a novel, but the publication of cheaper editions, in the case of books suitable for the cheap edition market, provides a good opportunity to convert loss into profit.

On 3s. 6d., 2s. 6d., and 2s. editions the margin of profit is usually greater because there is no heavy initial manufacturing cost to be borne. Cheap editions are usually printed from standing type, thus saving the heavy initial cost of composition. But certain types of novel are being issued, in increasing numbers, be it noted, at 3s. 6d. instead of 7s. 6d. in the first instance. Here are some actual production figures :

| Date                      |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
|---------------------------|-------------|----|----|----|-----------------------|----|----|
| Title                     | 3s. 6d. net |    |    |    | Pages—Letterpress 256 |    |    |
| No. Printed               |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| 5,000                     |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
|                           |             |    |    |    | £                     | s. | d. |
| Composition               | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 48                    | 0  | 0  |
| Corrections               | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 6                     | 0  | 0  |
| Machining Text            | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 34                    | 0  | 0  |
| „ Colour Illustrations    |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| „ Half-tone Illustrations |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| „ Frontispiece            |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Paper—Text                | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 53                    | 2  | 0  |
| „ Illustrations           |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| „ Frontispiece            |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Cover Design              |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| „ Blocks                  | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 1                     | 2  | 9  |
| Moulds                    | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 12                    | 0  | 0  |
| Stereos                   |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Electrotypes              |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Jacket                    |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Artist                    | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 8                     | 8  | 0  |
| Blocks                    | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 7                     | 10 | 0  |
| Paper                     | ..          | .. | .. | .. | 9                     | 0  | 0  |
| Composition and Machining |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |
| Various                   |             |    |    |    |                       |    |    |

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                 | d.                  |
| Cost per Copy .. .. .           | 8 $\frac{7}{8}$     |
| O/H .. .. .                     | 6 $\frac{1}{2}$     |
| Binding .. .. .                 | 5 $\frac{3}{8}$     |
| Folding and Gathering           |                     |
| Royalty (say 10 per cent) .. .. | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$     |
|                                 | <hr/>               |
|                                 | 2s. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ |

Published price 3s. 6d.

Average selling price 2s. 3d.

In this instance, of course, the cost of composition has to be allowed for. Including the author's 10 per cent royalty, the cost per copy of a first edition of 5,000 works out at 2s. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., and the average selling price at 2s. 3d. It must be noted that a special jacket design was commissioned for this particular book.

Here are specimen production figures for a non-fiction book :

18s. Large Demy 8vo. 320 pp. 16 illustrations. 1,500 copies.

|   | £     | s. | d. |
|---|-------|----|----|
| Composing 320 pp. £9 10s. per 32 pp. .. | 95    | 0  | 0  |
| Corrections .. .. .                     | 10    | 0  | 0  |
| Machining 1,500 copies .. .. .          | 26    | 0  | 0  |
| Paper for text, 37 × 49, 155 lbs. ..    | 27    | 0  | 0  |
| 16 half-tone blocks at 25s. each ..     | 20    | 0  | 0  |
| Paper for illustrations .. .. .         | 8     | 5  | 0  |
| Machining illustrations .. .. .         | 9     | 10 | 0  |
| Binding 1,500 copies at 1s. 1d. ..      | 81    | 5  | 0  |
| Binding blocks .. .. .                  | 1     | 10 | 0  |
| Jacket .. .. .                          | 5     | 5  | 0  |
|   | <hr/> |    |    |
|   | £283  | 15 | 0  |

To this total has to be added the royalty payable to the author, which may be anything from 10 to 20 per cent. Fifteen per cent is an average commencing royalty for a book of this type. The publisher usually allots about £100 for advertising, and this important item has also to be taken into consideration.

Authors of a mathematical turn of mind can readily satisfy themselves from the various figures I have quoted that the publisher's expectation of profit, in the case of most of the books on their list, is at best only very moderate.

To understand the marketing of books an author needs to know something of the library system. The Big Four of the book world are Messrs. W. H. Smith and Son, Boot's, Mudie's, and The Times Book Club. In this country at any rate—in America the lending library is a comparatively unknown institution—people are accustomed to borrowing books, especially novels. "No Briton buys a book that he can borrow." The public which actually *buys* novels is, in point of numbers, negligible. When one reflects that there are forty odd million people in this country, out of which number surely at least half a million would enjoy a novel of some sort, and that a novel which is widely reviewed and discussed and generally regarded as a "success" perhaps sells—with luck—5,000 copies in all, the fact is brought home.

It is not my intention to discuss the merits and demerits of the library system, except from the author's point of view, and then only because a certain aspect of the situation is apt to be overlooked. At first sight it would appear that the libraries, by lending books to the public for a subscription which works out at a few pence

a volume, prevent, or at least diminish, the sale of books. But what would happen if there were no libraries? Would the reading public buy the books it now borrows? I think not. The output of publishers would suddenly dwindle to insignificant proportions. There would be no market for at least 75 per cent of the novels which are now published. Whether that would be a good thing or not is not for me to say. The point is that the libraries can afford to lay in stocks of new fiction to meet the voracious demands of their subscribers—and no one reads books so quickly as the lending library subscriber—and the publishers in their turn can only afford to publish many of their books because they are assured of a certain sale to the libraries.

With books of general interest, the proportion of buyers to borrowers is certainly much higher, but one result of the library system has been to raise the prices of general books, and this has attracted to the libraries the people who cannot afford to pay big prices for books. And there are many books published which many people want to read and only a few would ever think of buying. The lending library system brings these books within their reach and makes it possible for the publisher to undertake their publication.

A novel which sells five thousand copies has, under present conditions, many times that number of readers, and the unhappy author may reflect that, but for the borrowing facilities afforded by the circulating libraries, he would undoubtedly earn more royalties.

But would he? It does not follow that any appreciable number of borrowers would become buyers if the libraries did not exist. A few authors of established



reputation might benefit by the withdrawal of borrowing facilities, but the majority would undoubtedly suffer. Unfortunately, as every publisher knows, reading is regarded by the British public as a luxury. The book-buying habit is confined to a negligible percentage of the population. If it were no longer possible to borrow fiction, biographies, reminiscences, and travel books for a modest annual subscription, it is exceedingly doubtful whether even an equivalent amount would actually be spent on the purchase of such books.

The libraries, by making new books easily and economically accessible, enable the reader to dip into the flood of present-day literature and add to his shelves those books which seem to him to have permanent interest or value.

Few publishers, I imagine, would support the theory that the libraries are harmful. For one thing, the libraries are the publishers' biggest and most dependable customers. To a large extent they are an insurance against loss. Moreover, the existence of the libraries, with the practical certainty of subscription sales (*i.e.*, orders in advance of publication), enables the publisher to produce novels by unknown authors. Without this library support it would be virtually impossible to publish the work of new writers. Advertising expenditure out of all proportion to the publisher's expectation of profit would be necessary in order to find a market for the book.

Owing to the present high cost of book production (roughly 400 per cent higher than pre-war) it is economically impossible for publishers to issue new books at a low price in the first instance unless they can be assured of a relatively big sale. If new books were withheld from the

libraries the poverty of the book-buying public would, I think, be at once revealed. Publishers' lists would shrink to very small proportions ; and only those books certain to sell in sufficient numbers would be issued. Unknown and comparatively unknown authors would, temporarily at all events, disappear.

The young author who inveighs against the lending libraries forgets that were it not for their existence he would probably never have been published at all. To take a broader view, the libraries are undoubtedly responsible, although indirectly, for many of the mediocre books, especially novels, published nowadays.

Novels are occasionally published at 6s., or even 5s., but 7s. 6d. is the standard price to-day, and with costs likely to remain at their present high level, there is little likelihood of any reduction. Not that 7s. 6d. is an excessive price to pay for a good new novel. Yet people who will cheerfully spend thirty shillings on a bottle of champagne, twenty-five shillings on a couple of theatre stalls, or five shillings for a cigar, would be horrified at the extravagance of spending 7s. 6d. on a novel.

The fault lies with the public, but the remedy lies with the publishers, booksellers, and authors, and all who have the welfare of books at heart. The public needs educating. It would be a mistake to try and eliminate the borrowing habit—better borrow books than not read at all. And the borrower of to-day may be the buyer of to-morrow. The book-buying habit has to be inculcated. The pleasure and advantage of books, as compared with other forms of entertainment, must be emphasised. Movements are already on foot to increase the public's

interest in books and to develop the habit of book-buying.

Authors, who are so directly affected, should certainly not hesitate to put their shoulders to the wheel. Propaganda verbal and written, goes a very long way.

## CHAPTER X

### FILM , DRAMATIC, SERIAL AND OTHER RIGHTS

AUTHORS who have not had first-hand experience of the film business are usually inclined to believe that it is not only delightfully easy to write or adapt their work for the screen, but that it readily yields enormous sums of money. Mention film rights to the inexperienced author and his eye lights up at once. This optimistic attitude is not justified by the facts.

The film industry is only just beginning to emerge from the critical stage which followed the early period, when it was regarded as something like an infant prodigy. It grew overnight, almost literally; and its commercial possibilities were so immediately manifest that many speculators and adventurers were attracted to this new field. The "boom" days, when everything, including prices, was experimental, gave way, as they were bound to do, to a discouraging slump; and the new industry is at the present time settling down. Better films are being produced; the unhealthy American monopoly is disappearing with the entrance into the field of German, Austrian and Scandanavian producers, and the welcome revival of the British industry, which has all along struggled against grave disadvantages.

Although there are no huge fortunes ready to fall into the lap of the author, film rights are (relatively) extremely valuable. But it must be clearly understood that the requirements of producers exclude all but a small proportion of stories. Enthusiastic amateur aspirants will spare themselves a lot of disappointment if they will only recognise the fact that the film specialist alone can judge whether a story is suitable for the screen. Even the established novelist is often incapable of judging which of his novels, if any, is acceptable from the film point of view.

Without attempting to give any comprehensive survey of the requirements of the photoplay market, it is still possible to indicate something of the policy and methods of film companies. In the first place, a distinction must be drawn between the original idea, whether it takes the form of a scenario or synopsis, and the published story which is adaptable for film purposes.

At once it must be stated that producers buy very little "outside" stuff. Once in a while a film company will invite the submission of original ideas, with the almost invariable stipulation that they take the form of synopses. Outside the trade only a very few people have any appreciation of even the elementary requirements of film technique, and every company has its own staff of scenario writers and editors. Scenario writing is emphatically the province of the professional. Producers don't want original scenarios from unknown writers. In the case of a well-known author whose work reveals pronounced film qualities, it often happens that he finds himself commissioned by a company to write stories for production, but it is useless under present conditions for the

amateur to approach firms or producers with original scripts.

The practice also has its dangers. Although no reputable firm would steal an idea from an outside contributor, there are still a number of quite unscrupulous people in the film business who would not hesitate—reluctant as one is to state the fact—to make use of unsolicited ideas without acknowledging their source. Copyright exists in the writer's work, it is true, but it is an exceedingly difficult thing to establish one's claim in the event of a plot or a situation being "lifted" in this way. With a published story it is a very different matter.

The majority of stories which are filmed are published either in book or serial form beforehand. Producers much prefer to consider a produced play, a published novel, or short story. In fact, many of them will not look at manuscripts at all.

Some firms, it is true, prefer to consider a published story in synopsis form. This is only a preliminary step, as, if they are interested, they will certainly want to read the complete story subsequently; but it saves a good deal of time, as it is nearly always possible to judge from the synopsis whether a story has screen possibilities or not.

There is an art in writing film synopses. Many producers read only the condensed version of a story, and if it pleases them they will use it as the foundation for the script.

An author who is preparing a synopsis of his story for film consideration should take considerable care to make it intelligible and, since it is his "window display," attractive. This does not mean, however, that literary

flourishes should be included. The "scheme" of the story should be disclosed at once and the salient points of the story should then be effectively summarised.

The length of synopses is from about two thousand to four thousand words. Whatever the length, there should be nothing superfluous; every word must contribute to the scaffolding of the story. Since the introduction of dialogue films, length is judged by time instead of (as formerly) by the number of reels or footage. It can be reckoned that a "feature" takes ninety minutes to show, a programme picture seventy minutes. A picture playing under an hour is regarded as a "second feature." The author should determine, if he can, how long his story would take to tell on the screen and label his synopsis accordingly.

One advantage from the author's point of view in approaching firms with a synopsis in the first instance is that it is less expensive to send around a synopsis than a copy of the book or script of a play, and if there is any delay or difficulty in recovering it it can easily be replaced. It is advisable to keep a copy of a synopsis, as one or two of the film companies are inclined to be careless with unsolicited material. In the case of a short story, a synopsis is of course quite unnecessary; the published story should be submitted.

A full length film is often made from a magazine story, particularly in America. Indeed, in many ways the short story lends itself better to film adaptation than the novel. Occasionally a short story is purchased with the intention of making a two-reeler out of it, in which case the price paid is considerably less than for a full-length film.

From the printed story, whether it be novel or short story, the producer can judge whether it has film possibilities, and on this basis they make their offer for the film rights. They then turn the story over to their own experts for conversion into a film. Incidentally, one may remark, that as a result of their labours, the bewildered author is frequently unable to trace more than a faint resemblance to the original. Indeed, the story goes that a well-known American writer, invited to witness the trade show of the film version of one of his novels, was unable to identify more than the name of one of his minor characters. Watching the film, he had an inspiration for another story, suggested by one of the situations, sat down and wrote it, and eventually submitted it to the very same film company, who promptly bought the rights.

The demand for new stories for the films is widespread, and, if anything, is increasing. Producers are always on the look-out for good filmable stories, and spend considerable time and money in reading the material submitted to them. The individual requirements of the various companies are, in a sense, less ascertainable than the needs, say, of a fiction magazine, of which the contents furnish a regular clue to the outside contributor. Those who study the productions of different companies will obtain an idea of what kind of story is required by each ; but perhaps the best indication is the personalities of the " stars " who are regularly featured in the same company's films, as the present tendency is undoubtedly to decide in favour of the story which will provide suitable parts for their own leading actors and actresses. Certain stories, for instance, would fall into the category of



"Betty Baifour" stories, and would be quite inappropriate for a different type of screen actress.

Many good stories are quite unsuitable for filming. There are certain prejudices in the film trade which vary from time to time. With one or two notable exceptions there is, for instance, at the present time a bias against costume pictures, and an objection to stories which involve the "doubling" of two parts by the same actor. Apart from such temporary disadvantages many stories, which at first sight may appear eminently filmable, will be found to make no appeal to producers.

The producer always has his eye on the public. And the film public is something very hard to define. Millions of people go to the pictures, and their numbers include many widely differing types. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated, their taste is as varied as their outlook on life. In this respect the present-day cinema differs from the theatre. Certain theatres have the reputation for a particular type of play, and different grades of theatres exist in order to cater for different tastes. The Lyceum audience is something entirely different from the St. James's. A development of the future may well be a similar distinction between one cinema and another. Meanwhile, the producer has to cater for a very catholic public, and not every writer can solve the problem for him.

The mechanical side of the business imposes many restrictions on the producer's decision, and objections arising in this respect may not be at all evident to the author. Producing is expensive, and pictures which require an enormous cast, vast spectacles, trick photography "stunts," double exposures, and so on, may be rejected

on the score of impracticability or expense. Many stories cannot be picturised without overloading the film with explanatory captions. All these technicalities are often a closed book to the author

The trade papers provide much useful information and should be carefully studied by the writer who has one eye on film rights when writing his novel or story. The activities of the various companies can be noted; trade reviews of films provide valuable indication of the type of story produced by each; articles will shed light on technical requirements; the personalities of different "stars" can be usefully studied.

But, generally speaking, the field is too wide and out of reach for the average author to be able to make a comprehensive study of its requirements. His best policy is to place his work in the hands of a competent agent who is in close touch with the market. The leading literary agencies have a film department both in New York and London and are better able to dispose of film rights than the author himself.

What are film rights worth? The answer to this question depends on other considerations. First, although not by any means most important, the story itself; the company which wants to buy the rights (perhaps the most important consideration of all); the standing of the author and the publicity value of the author's name or of the story itself; sometimes the cost of production. Stories are bought by British firms for £100, or even £50, but this is the minimum figure. The average price for an ordinary "feature" where the author is not very well known is about £400 in this country. In America prices run higher, \$3,000 being a common figure. As

much as £5,000 was paid recently by an English company, but that is an uncommonly big figure here. In America, \$50,000 is by no means a top price. The highest price I have heard of is the £25,000 paid to Miss Edna Ferber for the film rights of her novel, *Cimarron*.

The film rights are leased for a number of years to the producing company, at the expiration of which period they revert to the owner of the copyright, usually the author. In America, however, film rights are often sold for the full term of copyright in consideration of the higher prices paid. Royalties are sometimes paid, but only to prominent authors, and then very rarely. In any case, the royalty basis, at any rate under present conditions, works out very unsatisfactorily in practice, although it sounds better theoretically.

The market for film rights is very well worth cultivation, but it is difficult to cultivate. I doubt whether anything but some years of practical experience will enable the author to understand and appreciate the requirements as well as the limitations of the business. However, it is so profitable a field that an author is justified in attempting closer acquaintanceship with its technicalities. I know several authors whose work has been a big success in films, but whose stories have failed surprisingly in book form—another indication of the essential difference between films and fiction. This note of warning has to be sounded, if only to counteract the general impression among authors that their work is capable of being successfully filmed. The point is that the author usually can't tell; and, failing first-hand knowledge of the business, he should leave the decision to others more expert. In any case, business arrangements, in the

fortunate event of his work satisfying the demands of producers, should be entrusted to a good agent.

Here are a few points as a general guide to the type of story which appeals to producing companies

1. Have as few main characters as possible. (Four at the outside.)
2. Avoid complicated plots. Stories can be as simple as possible ("Cinderella" stories are perennially popular, for instance but must have an original twist)
3. Youth in the film must be emphasised unless the story is for an Emil Jannings or a Marie Dressler.
4. Good dialogue is at a premium for "talkie" requirements. A novel or play (or even a short story) with crisp, sparkling dialogue is likely to find favour.
5. Do not forget comedy. This is important for all stories
6. And in spite of all arguments, a happy ending is the best.

Somebody once said that at some time or other in his life every man has the ambition to write a play. "And nearly all of them write it," said a cynic to me recently. Perhaps he was justified in his bitterness, for he had spent several weeks in wading through an incredibly large number of entries for a play competition only to find that the percentage of plays which were *worth consideration* worked out at less than one per cent.

Writing a play has an attraction which is easy to understand. It looks easy; from the actual writing point of view much less formidable than a novel. To be a dramatist seems to be on a higher plane somehow than to be a mere novelist. The sensation of power which the aspiring dramatist anticipates probably captures his : it must be wonderful (he thinks) to set in

motion the intricate mechanism of the theatre, to put his own words into the mouths of distinguished actors and actresses. The glamour surrounding the theatre still exists for those who are innocent of its ways. And, finally, it is generally believed that a successful play will make the fortune of the author

It is a delightful prospect. As a result of this general conception of the *rôle* of the dramatist, and in all ignorance of the heart-breaking disappointments and complete disillusionment which await ninety-nine out of every hundred budding playwrights, men and women of all ages and temperaments, and in every conceivable situation in life, cheerfully set about writing a play, in the optimistic expectation that it has only to be brought before a manager with sufficient insight and artistic appreciation to make their fame and fortune overnight.

But the art of the playwright is a gift rarely bestowed. It is infinitely more difficult to write a good play than a good novel, or even a good short story. It is equally difficult to write a commercial play. It is also difficult to judge a play. Negatively, one can say that a play fails for certain reasons, but the *flair* for detecting a potentially successful play is almost as rare as the ability to write one.

From time to time we hear managerial laments of the scarcity of good plays and of new playwrights of promise. And here we are confronted with a curious paradox. On the one hand, managers openly appeal for new plays of merit, and on the other we have an almost cynical discouragement of new talent. Probably because they are so disheartened by the quantity of appallingly poor efforts which come to their desks, managers view a new

play by an unknown writer with indifference and an air of gloomy resignation, which is fatal to the chances of any play not of outstanding merit.

Theatrical production is a gamble on a very expensive scale. The production of a West End play costs about £5,000, and few managers can afford to experiment. This directly militates against the unknown author. Producers who thus play for safety by producing the mediocre work of established playwrights, in preference to experimenting with the effort of an unknown author, are not always to be blamed for their attitude. Few plays make any money ; it is estimated that only about 15 per cent show any substantial profit. As soon as a new play, courageously produced by one of the play-producing societies—to which I shall refer later—shows signs of being a success, managers fall head over heels in their anxiety to acquire the production rights.

Many a really good play has doubtless lost all chance of production, partly through the genuine difficulty in discerning dramatic merit, and also through the indifference of managers, which, in its turn, is due to the avalanche of woefully poor material with which other beginners steadily bombard them. Perhaps it is going too far to suggest that managers have given up all hope of discovering new talent, but, compared at any rate with journalism and publishing, there is a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm. Some managers even refuse to read unsolicited manuscripts.

In spite of these discouraging conditions, and even admitting that writing a good play is a very difficult achievement, the "urge" is so strong that people will still go on writing plays ; and although it does not fall

within the scope of this book to attempt any instruction in the art of playwriting (though, to quote Mr. William Archer, "there are no rules for writing plays"), something must be said about the requirements of a successful play and the conditions under which plays are accepted and produced.

Without inborn dramatic instinct no one can hope to write a good play. (Unfortunately, it is hopeless to try and convince *anyone* who writes a play that he or she may *not* possess this essential qualification.) It is true that most of us have some fundamental dramatic instinct, and there is no doubt that it can be fostered and developed by constant playgoing.

It is also true that no one can hope to write a successful play without some knowledge or appreciation of the mechanical limitations of stage production. Too many characters will deprive a play of any commercial chance it may possess. A big cast is expensive, as is elaborate scenery, and neither is likely to appeal to a manager. By constantly going to see plays performed, the would-be playwright can learn a great deal.

Of all technical points which may thus be noted, perhaps the most valuable is the study of exits and entrances. By observing how the practised dramatist brings his characters on and takes them off the stage much amateurishness may be avoided. The relative effectiveness of "curtains" may be also studied, and many other important points of craftsmanship.

There are four ways of submitting a play: (1) to a manager direct; (2) to a leading actor or actress in the hope that a part in the play may appeal to them so strongly that they will bring pressure to bear on a manager

in order to play the part ; (3) to send it to a play-producing society or repertory company ; (4) to employ an agent.

The first method has been touched upon already. The second is not a bad plan, if the playwright is acquainted with actors and actresses of sufficient standing ; many plays have been accepted in this way. The third method brings us to the play-producing society, about which a word must be said.

The development of the play-producing society is a welcome sign. These are societies formed with the idea of encouraging and fostering new dramatic talent. They will often undertake the production of plays unlikely to appeal to a commercial management, but it is significant that their Sunday presentations are watched with keen interest by West End managers. In fact, many of the biggest successes of recent years were first produced by one or other of the repertory companies. *Journey's End*, *Young Woodley*, *Abraham Lincoln*, and *The Lady with the Lamp* were all originally produced in this way.

Before going on to deal with the fourth way of submitting a play, viz., through an agent, let us examine briefly the conditions under which plays are usually accepted. The customary arrangement is on a royalty basis, with an advance payment in anticipation of royalties, the royalty consisting of a percentage of box-office receipts. The actual percentage varies with the standing of the author.

A clause of considerable importance to the author, which on that account should never be omitted from any dramatic contract, provides for the production of the play within a certain time, usually twelve months from the date of the contract. If the manager fails to produce the



play within the specified time the rights revert to the author. This prevents an unscrupulous manager from bottling up a play which he himself has no intention of producing, but which he is anxious to keep out of the hands of his rivals.

It is also customary for the producer to undertake to present the play for a certain period each year following the first performance and in the event of his failing to do so the rights revert to the author.

Plays should never be sold outright. In one of his novels, Leonard Merrick who writes with a real knowledge of the stage of that period, describes the enormous commercial success of a play which the young author was induced to sell for the handsome outright payment of ten pounds. Things are not so bad as that to-day, but there are still many unscrupulous people in the lower grades of the theatrical profession who would not hesitate to take advantage of an author's ignorance.

The question of film rights is one which has changed considerably in the last two or three years, the change being hastened by the arrival of the "talkies." Formerly "film" and "play" rights were quite distinct and were sold in different markets; now it is usual in the case of an unknown author at any rate, to allow the manager, provided that he is responsible for presenting the play in America, a share of the film or talking film rights.

This change has come about because the technique of a play and a "talkie" are in many ways so similar that a successful production as a play will enormously increase the value of the talking film rights, and in fact a play will frequently be kept on by a manager even at a loss in order to obtain a good film price. It is obviously

reasonable, therefore, that an author, unless his name is already famous, should allow the manager to share in proceeds which he has materially helped to increase, and sometimes even create. Further, since the spread of cinemas all over the country it has become customary to insert in contracts a clause providing that the film rights will not be released until eighteen months after production. This clause is advisable in the author's own interests if he is to obtain any provincial royalties, for the manager cannot be expected to send out a successful tour if the film has previously been shown throughout the country a few weeks before.

I reproduce a specimen dramatic contract for a first play by an author whose previous success had been confined to fiction :

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made and entered  
 this day of 19 BETWEEN AND  
 care of of  
 (hereinafter called the Author) of the one  
 part AND whose registered offices are  
 the (hereinafter called the Managers) of the  
 other part concerning a play by the Author entitled :

hereinafter called the said play

WHEREBY IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

1. In consideration of the agreements on the part of the Managers hereinafter mentioned the Author hereby grants to the Managers the sole and exclusive licence to perform the said play in the English language throughout the British Empire (except Canada) for so long as five years from the date of the signing of this agreement provided Fifty (50) performances are given and paid for annually dating from the first performance given under this agreement and provided that the stipulations herein provided for are complied with.

2. The Managers shall pay upon the signing and execution of this agreement the sum of One hundred pounds (£100) without which payment this agreement shall not be valid which sum shall be in advance and on account of the royalties hereinafter provided for but shall not be returnable in any event whatsoever.
3. The Managers shall produce the said play in a first-class manner in a first-class theatre in the West End of London within one year of the signing of this agreement. If the Managers shall not have produced the said play as herein provided for within one year of the signing of this agreement they shall have the right to postpone the production for a further six months upon payment of a further sum of fifty pounds (£50) also in advance of royalties and not returnable. If the Managers shall not have produced the said play as herein provided for within eighteen months of the signing of this agreement then all rights and licences herein granted shall revert to the Author and this agreement shall become null and void.
4. The Managers shall pay to the Author royalties on the gross receipts from the sale of seats and admission to any theatre or place of entertainment where the said play shall be played at the rates following, less entertainment tax and library commissions if any:
 

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| On the gross weekly receipts up to one thousand pounds five per cent.....  | 5%  |
| On the gross weekly receipts in excess of one thousand pounds and not exceeding fourteen hundred pounds seven and one half per cent..... | 7½% |
| On the gross receipts in excess of fourteen hundred pounds ten per cent.....   | 10% |
5. In the event of the Managers duly producing the said play in the West End of London as herein provided for they shall have for a period of four weeks after the first London production an option to secure upon payment of two hundred pounds (£200) in advance and on account of royalties which shall become payable in America and Canada, but not returnable in any event whatever, the sole and exclusive licence to

perform the said play in the English language throughout the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada for a period of five years from the first performance of the play in the United States or Canada, provided that the conditions of this agreement are complied with.

6. In the event of the Managers duly exercising their option on the performing rights in the United States of America and Canada they shall produce or cause to be produced the said play in New York, Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia within one year of exercising their option on the American rights or shall forfeit all right and licence in and to the said play in the United States and Canada.
7. In the event of the Managers exercising their option on the American and Canadian performing rights in the said play and duly producing the said play or causing it to be produced as herein provided for they shall pay to the Author royalties on the gross receipts from the sale of seats and admission to any theatre or place of entertainment where the said play shall be played at the rates following, less entertainment tax :

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| On the gross weekly receipts up to five thousand dollars five per cent.....  | 5%  |
| On the gross receipts in excess of five thousand dollars and not exceeding seven thousand dollars seven and one half per cent..... | 7½% |
| On the gross weekly receipts in excess of seven thousand dollars ten per cent...   | 10% |

except that these terms shall not apply to the so-called stock and repertory performances the terms for which are hereinafter provided for.

8. The Managers shall pay to the Author one half of all sums paid by American and Canadian stock and repertory companies. They shall use their best endeavours to get the highest terms from such stock and repertory companies, and shall pay to the Author his share of all proceeds as and when received by the Managers.
9. The Managers shall pay to the Author if they shall sublet the Colonial (except Canadian) rights two thirds of all sums

received by them from the sale or lease of the Colonial rights, whether such sums be royalties, advances on royalties fees premiums or indemnities. If the Managers shall produce the play under their own management in the Colonies (except Canada) they shall pay to the Author the fees and royalties herein provided for the British Empire.

10. The Managers shall furnish to the Author certified nightly returns and accounts of the takings of the said play and shall forward these together with a statement of the gross weekly receipts and all sums that shall be shown to be due to the Author not later than Friday following any week in which any performance of the play shall have been given. The Managers shall give to the Author or his duly appointed representatives access at all reasonable times to all books papers vouchers and other documents necessary to verify such accounts.
11. The Managers shall not make nor permit to be made any serious alteration in the text of the said play without the consent of the Author which \*consent shall not be unreasonably withheld.
12. The Managers shall announce on all programmes posters and other advertising matter connected with the said play the name of  
as Author of the said play.
13. Notwithstanding anything in this agreement to the contrary the Author reserves to himself all rights of mechanically reproducing the words or actions of the said play or any part thereof. Further the author agrees that should the Managers produce the said play or cause it to be produced in the United States of America as herein provided then the Author will pay to the Managers one-third of any net sums received during the validity of this contract from any lease or disposal of the film or talking film rights in the said play but undertakes that no film version of the play shall be shown with his consent in the British Empire (except Canada) within eighteen months of the first performance of the play under this contract, and if the Managers shall exercise their option on the American and Canadian rights no film version shall be shown within the territory of the United States of America

and the Dominion of Canada with his consent prior to eighteen months from the first performance of the play in the United States of America or Dominion of Canada.

14. Notwithstanding anything in this agreement to the contrary the Author reserves to himself all amateur rights in and to the said play but undertakes that no amateur rights shall be given with his consent in the British Empire (except Canada) for eighteen months from the end of the first London run of the said play, and in America and Canada (if the Managers shall exercise their option and duly produce the play in this territory) for eighteen months from the end of the first run of the play in America or Canada.
15. The Managers shall not assign this agreement or any part thereof without the sanction of the Author, but they may sublet the benefits thereof provided that nothing in this clause be deemed to relieve them of responsibilities towards the Author.
16. Upon the termination of this agreement the Managers shall return to the Author all manuscript of the play in their possession.
17. If the Managers shall at any time forfeit for any reason their right to produce the said play in the United States of America and Canada this shall not in any way affect their licence to perform the play throughout the British Empire (except Canada), and if the Managers shall at any time forfeit their licence to perform the said play in the British Empire (except Canada) this shall not affect their licence to perform the play in the United States of America and Canada provided that they shall have exercised the option provided for in clause five hereof.
18. This agreement does not constitute a partnership between the parties hereto.
19. This agreement is binding upon the heirs executors and administrators and assigns of the Author and upon the successors and assigns of the Managers.
20. All rights other than those specifically provided for in this agreement are reserved by the Author, including all publication rights, novelisation rights and serial rights.



(hereinafter called the Dramatist) of the other part concerning a novel by the Author entitled:

hereinafter called the said play

WHEREBY IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Author hereby grants to the Dramatist the sole and exclusive licence to prepare a play based upon the said novel such play to be submitted to him for his approval before production which approval shall not be unreasonably withheld.
2. The Dramatist shall have eighteen months from the date of the signing of this agreement to secure a contract upon terms satisfactory to the Author for the production of the play. If the Dramatist shall not have secured a contract for the production of the play within eighteen months of the signing of this agreement then the Author shall be at liberty to terminate this agreement any time after the expiry of the said eighteen months provided that he gives to the Dramatist one month's notice of his desire to terminate such agreement.
3. All sums accruing from the dramatic rights in and to the said play either as royalties, advances on royalties, premiums, fees or from any other source shall be divided equally between the Author and the Dramatist share and share alike.
4. The Dramatist shall announce on all programmes posters and other advertising matter connected with the said play that the play is based upon a novel of the same name by
5. The Dramatist shall defray all costs of typing and making arrangements for the said play.
6. If the Author shall lease, sell, or otherwise dispose of the rights of mechanically reproducing the words or actions of the said novel (hereinafter called the film rights) before the Dramatist shall secure a contract for the production of the play then the Dramatist shall not have any share or interest in such film rights. If the Dramatist shall secure a contract for the production of the play on terms satisfactory to the Author then in the event of the film rights in the novel not having been sold leased or otherwise disposed of upon the date of the signature of the contract for the production



of the play then the Author agrees not to sell lease or dispose of the film rights in the novel prior to its production in dramatic form or failing its production prior to the termination of any agreement made for its production owing to non-performance. Upon production of the play the Dramatist shall acquire a one-third interest in the film rights in the said play and novel and any contract for the sale or lease of the film rights shall be subject to the approval of both parties to this agreement and in order to render such contract for the film rights valid the signatures of both the Dramatist and the Author shall be necessary.

7. This agreement is binding upon the heirs executors administrators and assigns of both the parties hereto.
8. Upon violation of this agreement the Author shall be at liberty to terminate this agreement by a written notice to that effect. It is understood and agreed that upon termination of this agreement for whatever cause the Author shall have no right or claim on the version prepared by the Dramatist.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF THE PARTIES  
HERETO HAVE SET THEIR HANDS ON  
THE DAY AND YEAR HEREINABOVE  
FIRST MENTIONED.

In reproducing both the foregoing contracts I have omitted the agency clause, and mention of this brings me to the fourth method of submitting a play.

Fully eighty per cent of the plays produced are handled by dramatic agents. It is obvious therefore that the beginner should submit his efforts to a good agent in preference to sending them direct to managers. The agents, even more so than on the book side, are acquainted with the requirements and movements of managers and are much more favourably placed in every way. But the agent must be good. The acid test of an agent's standing is the number of plays and dramatists for whom

he is responsible. It must not be assumed, however, that the agent will be willing to handle any play submitted to him. Far from it. Only about ten per cent of the plays sent to him are retained for negotiation. But the beginner should certainly try to get an agent to represent him. If the agent isn't impressed by all means let him submit the script himself to managers. Even agents are fallible and sometimes entertain angels unawares.

There is a number of good play agents, and the bigger literary agencies usually have an active dramatic department. If the aspiring playwright can get a good agent to represent his interests, this is undoubtedly the most promising method of trying to place his work.

We now come to serialisation, by no means the least important of the author's outside rights. Serial rights in a non-fiction work obviously depend for their importance on the nature of the book. Some books are quite incapable of serialisation. At first sight it would appear that books of technical interest come into this category, but there is usually a market for at least a portion of the material in one of the specialist or trade papers. The serial rights of memoirs or reminiscences are often very valuable, and big prices have been paid by newspapers for these rights. Any book which has a "news value" will similarly appeal to an editor.

It is difficult to decide whether previous publication in a newspaper or magazine has an injurious effect on the sales of the book. It may be contended that such publication, if not actually of the whole of the material, at any rate of the most interesting portions, which is naturally what an editor would select for publication, prevents

readers from buying the book when it is published. The balance of opinion seems to be in favour of the theory that the damage, if any, is negligible. The newspaper public is probably a different public altogether from the book public. The majority of publishers take this view, and it is a rare thing for the publisher to object to previous serialisation of a book. Some publishers welcome it, believing that any book readers who may be lost as a result of reading the serial instalments are more than accounted for by reason of the preliminary publicity which the book has received. Once more, it all depends on the book. Serialisation cuts both ways ; in the case of a disappointing book, serialisation probably does harm, but in the case of a good book, the discussion caused by publication of instalments probably serves to stimulate the general interest, which can only have a favourable effect on the book's sales.

"It is very difficult to generalise about the effect of serialisation on book sales, but, in our experience, serialisation does in nine cases out of ten materially help the sale of a book." I quote Sir Ernest Benn, as reported in *World's Press News*.

Whatever view may be taken regarding the wisdom of serialisation, the fact remains that serial rights are of considerable direct value to the author. Authors who are not influenced by financial considerations—and many of the distinguished people who write their memoirs are not—can decide for themselves whether or no they prefer preliminary publication in newspaper or magazine. I know one very eminent author who regards it as being undignified. But to the vast majority of writers, serial rights are a welcome source of revenue.

It is not easy to give any estimates of the value of serial rights, since the value naturally varies in accordance with the importance of the book. It sometimes happens that current events invest a book with the importance of topicality, and it follows that the value of the serial rights is immediately enhanced. Market prices also fluctuate; the reminiscences which will fetch £500 to-day may to-morrow be worth less or more—it is impossible to say. The general tendency is in the direction of increased prices, competition in Fleet Street especially being keener than ever.

American serial rights are even more valuable than British. The huge circulations enjoyed by many of the leading magazines in the United States enable them to pay rates with which no British magazine could compete. In this country £1,000 is a big price for the first British serial rights of a novel, whereas in the United States \$10,000 upwards has been paid for the American serial rights of a book by a prominent author.

This market is one that every writer should cultivate and study. Indeed, I imagine that American serial rights, and the possibilities which they open up, figure prominently in the dreams of most writers of fiction both here and across the Atlantic. It is important, therefore, that British authors should appreciate the essential individuality of the type of serial story that the American magazine editor wants. The difference between British and American serial requirements is as real as the difference between the British and American weather, and no one who has not experienced both can judge just what that difference is.

American serial rights of non-fiction books are just as

valuable as in the case of novels. The American reading public has—perhaps more than any other reading public in the world—a keen interest in everything new, everything vital, that “happens along” in the world in which they live. The personalities of foreign statesmen and public figures interest them far more than they interest the average man and woman of France or even Britain. This opens up a wide field for the serialisation of non-fiction books. The magazines and newspapers, too, usually have more space at their disposal for features of this nature than have the majority of papers and periodicals in this country. They can therefore run the serialised version of a travel book, or a book with a topical interest, to a greater length—and therefore pay more—than will be possible in England. An author who has sold the serial rights of his books in both countries for several years told me recently that in every case the American magazine concerned published the whole 70,000 or 80,000 words of the book in question, whereas in this country he had never been able to induce an editor to print extracts totalling more than 30,000 words.

Second serial rights are the use of material after publication, whether in book or previous serial form. A newspaper or magazine will often purchase the right to publish serially a book or portions of a book which has already appeared, but the prices paid for material bought in this way are naturally much lower, roughly about one third of first serial rates. For the serial rights of a published novel, for instance, which prior to publication might have realised about £200, a fair price for second serial rights would be about £75. The second serial market has undergone considerable development in

recent years and these figures should be accepted with reserve. The general tendency is for prices to rise. The second rights of a certain moderately successful novel (which had previously been published in book, though not in serial form) fetched £200 from a London evening newspaper ; and exceptional properties, such as the play *Journey's End*, which was serialised several times, realise exceptional prices. The fact that a serial has already appeared in another paper or magazine will not necessarily prevent an editor from buying second serial rights. If, in its previous serial form, it was unlikely to have reached the particular public for which his own paper caters, and yet is the kind of story that will interest his readers, he will usually be glad to consider second rights. Sir Hall Caine is a good example of the type of author whose work has such a universal appeal that it can make successive appearances in different serial markets and thus reach as many different publics.

Foreign rights are not, of course, to be compared in monetary value with British and American rights, although in the last few years prices have improved considerably. The intricacies of international copyright laws and the many difficulties which are apt to occur in negotiations with foreign publishers and editors make it more than ever advisable for an author to entrust the sale of his translation rights to an expert familiar with the conditions of these particular markets. Translation rights are not negligible and if handled with as much care and knowledge as British rights may prove advantageous from many points of view. Translated editions are invaluable publicity to an author, and in the few cases where

an English or American author's books do become "best-sellers" abroad the financial receipts are by no means inconsiderable.

Generally speaking, any book which is popular in its original language will find favour in translation. At the present time\* the best markets for English books are Germany and the Scandinavian countries, the latter being grouped linguistically as follows (a) Swedish and (b) Danish-Norwegian. The Central European countries (Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, etc.) are buying many more books than formerly, and outstanding books usually in time find a publisher in France, but there is little demand for English and American books in either Spain or Italy. The market in Holland is complicated by the fact that according to Dutch law, American books are non-copy-right in that country. Russia, like the United States, lies outside the Berne Convention copyright ruling.

The prices paid for foreign rights vary considerably and depend on the type of book and the country in which it is sold. The heavy cost of translation, often substantial, must be taken into account. It is almost impossible to quote average prices, but in general it may be said that a small royalty with an advance varying from £15 to £50 is obtainable from Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries, and an outright sum of £15 4s. or a smaller royalty and advance from the Central European countries, Holland, and Poland.

The literary agency with which I am associated has done much to eliminate from the translation business the *useless* translator. Formerly the English author was at the mercy of any translator who wrote to him or

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\* Written in 1930.

his publisher asking for an option on a book, generally promising fifty per cent. of the proceeds of any sale. If the translator could not sell his—or in most instances her—translation the author got nothing. Even if a sale were made there was no way of keeping track of the receipts.

This proved so haphazard and profitless a proceeding that it was found more satisfactory to deal direct with foreign publishers, who generally prefer to choose their own translators. It is thus practicable to collect payments promptly, to negotiate for adequate terms, to look after such matters as publication dates, and so on.

By employing local agents in each country, who are in direct and personal touch with foreign publishers, an agency is able to obtain better *net* results for its authors than by handling the business entirely by correspondence from London. For Continental transactions nineteen per cent. commission is usually charged. This may seem a lot on paper, but is justified by results. Agents doing similar work on the Continent charge from 20 to 30 per cent.; and some English and American publishers still charge 50 per cent. commission on these translation sales. Incidentally, the 20 per cent. tax levied on monies earned in Great Britain is not charged on the proceeds of translation rights from the Continent.

This chapter would not be complete without some reference to the market which has come into existence through the advent of broadcasting. A provisional form of agreement between the British Broadcasting Company and the Authors' Society protects authors' rights in this new field. This market is worth consideration from the



point of view of publicity, as well as of financial remuneration, but it is only fair that the work of authors and dramatists should not be utilised without monetary return to the author. This is the provisional agreement referred to :

AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION AND THE INCORPORATED SOCIETY OF AUTHORS, PLAYWRIGHTS AND COMPOSERS (as published in *The Author, Playwright and Composer*, April 1928).

1. That a minimum fee of £3 3s. per Act, Canto or Division be paid by the British Broadcasting Corporation for a single performance of a play, provided that such Act, Canto or Division exceeds 200 lines in length.
2. That a minimum fee of 10s. 6d. be paid for a single performance of a short poem not exceeding 100 lines in length.
3. That a minimum fee of £1 1s. be paid for a single performance of a poem exceeding 100 lines and not exceeding 200 lines in length and 10s. 6d. for every succeeding 100 lines.
4. That a minimum fee of £1 1s. be paid for a single performance of excerpts, monologues, etc., not exceeding 200 lines in length.
5. That in the case of short stories, excerpts from a work in prose or serial matter which have been published, a minimum fee of £2 2s. shall be paid for the first 1,000 words and pro rata for every succeeding 1,000 words for a single performance. For the same matter, *i.e.*, short stories, excerpts from a work of prose, or essays and serial matter which have not been published, a minimum fee of £3 3s. per 1,000 words and pro rata for every succeeding 1,000 words for a single performance.
6. That the terms set out in Clause 5 shall not apply to work referred to in that clause which is broadcast during the Children's Hour, when a minimum fee of £1 1s. shall be paid for the first 1,000 words and pro rata for every succeeding 1,000 words for a single performance. Similarly the terms set out in Clause 1 shall not apply to plays broadcast during the Children's Hour, when a minimum fee of £1 1s. shall replace the minimum of £3 3s. mentioned in Clause 1.

7. That no abridgment or alteration be made from the original without the author's sanction.
8. That these arrangements stand for a period of three years from January 1, 1928.

It will be seen that the B.B.C. at any rate credit broadcasting with the possibility of stimulating public interest in an author's work, with a consequent increase of book sales, but on the principle that what is worth having is worth paying for, the B.B.C. may find it necessary to offer better terms if they wish to give the public the work of all the best authors.

There are several other minor rights in copyright literary property—calendar rights, souvenir rights, cigarette picture rights, gramophone record rights, to name a few—to which it is not possible to devote space. In any case they rarely fall within the scope of the ordinary writer. But enough ground has been covered in this chapter to indicate to the author the importance and relative value of subsidiary rights.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE AUTHOR AND PUBLICITY

Books, like any other commodity, are subject to the familiar law of supply and demand. Public demand for a book is created in a variety of ways, some of which differ from ordinary commercial processes on account of the peculiar relationship of the author and his work. Having written his book, should the author confine his subsequent interest in its progress to the semi-annual collection of royalties, leaving the problem of salesmanship entirely to the publisher ?

The majority of authors, let it be said at once, are willing to help the publisher in selling their books in any way compatible with their personal and professional dignity. That is to say, they are willing to have paragraphs printed about themselves and photographs published, provided that by such means their sales are likely to be increased. Not many will personally enquire for their books at the libraries or at bookstalls, although I know several authors who put their shoulders to the wheel in this way. It is also true that many authors welcome publicity for its own sake, and such vanity is harmless enough. Whether publicity actually sells books is, however, open to question.

It is difficult, almost impossible, to gauge the value

of publicity in its direct relation to sales. But it is a problem from which the author cannot separate himself, for he is permanently associated with the books that bear his name. The man who makes soap or cigarettes or furniture is of no interest personally to the public that buys the article; but the public which reads books is naturally interested (perhaps only to a mild extent, it is true) in the personality of the author. An author's "public" is naturally interested in his personality and private life. How far this interest should be satisfied depends on the personal predilections of the author concerned and the potential selling force created by publicity in relation to the author.

The theory that publicity sells books, or helps to sell books, is indeed disputed. There are authors who do not believe in publicity, and of whom the public is allowed to know nothing; such is Miss Ethel M. Dell, whose photograph has never, to my knowledge, been published. On the other hand, many well-known authors attribute their success largely to the publicity they and their books have attained. There is a good deal to be said for both sides. Perhaps it would be near the truth to say that Miss Dell is not the type of author to benefit from widespread publicity; her public, if one may say so, is not to be influenced by newspaper comment, nor would she be likely to increase the number of her readers by taking a more active part in social or literary life. It has also been suggested that her complete retirement from publicity has caused a certain mystery to attach itself to her personality, with the result that people read her books more eagerly and in greater numbers than ever before. But Miss Dell is probably an exception.

The truth, I expect, lies somewhere between the two extremes. A judicious amount of publicity probably influences on an author's sales. The most valuable kind of publicity is that which reaches an author's potential public ; that is to say, an article in the *Bookman* on Mr. Walter de la Mare, or an article in the *Tatler* on Mr. Michael Arlen, is more likely to be productive of practical results than the same articles in a popular periodical like *Answers*. (I plead forgiveness from the editor of *Answers* should this heterodox suggestion outrage his eye.)

Publicity, in any case, and whatever form it may take, should not be regarded as anything but a literary trimming. It is, I am convinced, not nearly so important as its enthusiastic devotees would have us believe. The reading public may be amused or mildly interested in the personality of the author or in news of his present and future work, but it would be claiming too much to assert that publicity in itself was responsible for attracting readers to an author's work. The appeal of books is more fundamental than that, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. But it serves an undeniably useful purpose in keeping the name of the author in front of the reader, or in reminding him of his intention to read a particular book by that author, or in suggesting the title of a book to add to his lending library list. Thus and thus are literary reputations built up—or destroyed.

For publicity is a two-edged weapon and it sometimes cuts both ways. The name of Mr. Driver Quill may occur so frequently in print that the reader, out of curiosity, may decide and eventually bring himself to read one of Mr. Driver Quill's novels ; but if he doesn't like that novel,

no amount of subsequent publicity will induce him to probe further into Mr. Quill's work. But the important point is that he has been induced to sample it—and then it depends on the book. In fact it almost always does depend on the book. Without underestimating the value of publicity in all its forms, one cannot too often be reminded of that fundamental truth.

A more practical consideration for the young writer is the extent to which he can make use of the weapon of publicity, whatever its value in the literary armoury. The average young author's attitude towards publicity is, "It's worth trying; it may help me, but if it doesn't, there's no harm done." An important point to remember is that publicity is not to be had for the asking. In securing, or endeavouring to secure, publicity the measure of the public's interest has to be taken into consideration. Most new authors are nonentities as far as the public is concerned, and I am convinced it is merely wasted effort for an author who has still to win his literary spurs to be paragraphed and pictured. Until the public expresses a definite interest in an author's work he should refrain from the practice of supplying paragraphs directly or indirectly to the press. As a matter of fact the press usually supplies the necessary corrective, as the foundation of all editorial publicity is "news interest." Nevertheless, some young authors suffer from such a confusion of thought in this connection that they imagine it is urgently desirable to get something into print about themselves. If the circumstances are exceptional the practice is, of course, justifiable.

If, for instance, an author has had an adventurous career before turning his hand to writing or if he has

previously earned distinction in another sphere, it may be worth while supplying some personal data to the publicity department of his publishers. Which brings us to an important point.

The author should not, as a rule, directly approach the press. It is a mistake to cultivate the acquaintance of or to seek to influence journalists or reviewers. It is another matter altogether if the author is approached by journalists asking for information, but that is not likely to happen to him until he has quite definitely "arrived." Nothing prejudices any conscientious newspaper man so much as an author soliciting publicity. The critic who values his reputation is very properly biassed against any personal attempt on the part of the author to ingratiate himself. Yet almost every day one hears of authors who, by personal interview, letters, introductions, and other means seek to secure publicity. One young novelist I know of, presuming upon his slight personal acquaintance—although, naturally enough, the busy news editor in question hadn't the least recollection of ever having met the over-enterprising author—wrote letter after letter to a prominent Sunday newspaper, hinting, hoping, suggesting, pleading for a review of his first novel. Such mistaken tactics—as well as the doubtful good taste of the epistolary bombardment—only exasperated the editor. As it happened, the book was feeble and no review of it has ever appeared in that newspaper.

The proper, and in fact the only legitimate channel is the publishers' publicity department. Most progressive publishers attach importance to this branch of book salesmanship. As a general rule the author is approached by the publicity manager, who diplomatically requests the

provision of such personal material as will assist the firm in selling the author's books. It is customary in the case of inexperienced authors for him to indicate the type of material suitable, for it is surprising how rarely authors appreciate the difference between what is fit for publication and what is not. Quite intelligent authors often have a hazy idea that the public want to know how many white mice they keep, or that they have made a pet of a toad or a mule, or that they invariably wear green underclothing. The revelation of such personal eccentricities does occasionally occur in print but only in the slushiest of gossip columns, and usually about inferior actors and actresses.

On the other hand, the reading public is genuinely interested in authentic, informative statements about the private activities of their favourite authors. If a novel, say, sells three thousand copies or so, it follows that at least twice that number of people have read the story, and of this number certainly the majority would be interested to read a personal item about the author.

Any information of this kind must, however, have a definite news value, or its chances of appearing in print are remote. Space is too valuable and readers too alert nowadays for editors to print anything which does not definitely contribute to the interest of their papers. And as it naturally follows that authors are not themselves the best judges of what will and what will not interest the public, it is usually the best plan for material to be supplied to the publishers and for them to use their discretion in selecting and arranging such material for distribution to appropriate channels in Fleet Street. Thus the author can to an extent be guided by his own feeling in this rather delicate matter. He should supply nothing which



he would not care to have appear in print. The publishers can sift the material and distribute only what is of legitimate interest and news value and circularise the press without loss of dignity.

It is a recognised journalistic practice for publishers to supply "puffs" about books and authors to the newspapers, and although pressure on newspaper space and in some quarters a disinclination to give gratuitous publicity have in recent years limited the operation of publishers in this direction, they still enjoy the privilege. Not unnaturally some newspapers are more inclined to give editorial publicity to those firms who advertise in their columns, but it does not necessarily follow that news of books and authors will be excluded because the firm that publishes them is not one of the paper's regular advertisers, any more than it follows that special editorial prominence is given to regular advertisers. Editorial publicity, as distinct from reviews, depends on two things: first, whether the paper in question opens its columns to book news, and secondly, and equally important, whether the book news sent by the publisher is of sufficient interest to justify the paper printing it.

Reviews are quite another matter. It is the custom of most newspapers and periodicals to print reviews of new books of importance subject to the amount of space available. No reputable journal is influenced in the slightest by advertising considerations. Advertisement revenue is very welcome, but it is (I am glad to say from practical experience) very rarely permitted to interfere with editorial policy. As a matter of fact, on most great newspapers the editorial and advertising departments work quite independently of each other.

And now we come to one of the most important phases of the author's career. Reviews or press criticisms of his work may be regarded as of varying importance. Some authors profess to be indifferent to press criticism ; others are keenly sensitive to the expressed opinions of experts and others, and relish praise and appreciation as keenly as they dread disapproval and indifference. I do not think I am far wrong if I suggest that however indifferent to criticism some authors may pretend to be, nearly everybody who writes for publication attaches great importance to reviews of his work.

The publisher is responsible for sending review copies to the press, and the number of copies sent, and to which papers, is as a rule best left to his discretion. This point is usually covered by a contract clause. The author cannot too often be reminded that the publisher's interests and his own are identical, and that the publisher has as much reason, if not more, for wishing to exploit every means in his power to sell the book as the author. Parenthetically, one has to admit that not every publisher is as fully alive to the science of selling books as he might be, and provided that the author is qualified to do so, there is no reason why he should not contribute to the desired end by diplomatic suggestions to the publisher.

In the matter of reviews it does indeed often happen that the author can profitably co-operate with the publisher, and most publishers are inclined to welcome suggestions from authors in regard to the distribution of review copies. Frequently the author has a number of personal friends in Fleet Street who review books or may be instrumental in getting books reviewed, and it would be quixotic if the author declined to take advantage of

the opportunity. At the same time, the author should be sure of his ground before suggesting to his publisher that special copies should be sent to the people he knows ; by presuming on slight acquaintance the author may be doing himself more harm than good.

We now come to the vexed question of the relationship of reviews and sales. Do reviews sell books ? It is very difficult to say. In practice, one so often encounters books that have glowing press notices and negligible sales, and, on the other hand, books that receive only slight attention—and generally indifferent or sarcastic in tone at that—whose sales are comparatively enormous, that at first sight it certainly does look as if there were no connection whatever between the two.

The explanation is probably that the reviewers do not represent public taste, and that people who read press criticisms and are influenced by them represent a higher grade of literary taste than the average. Probably only a small proportion of the reading public is interested in reviews. At any rate it is fairly certain that an author like Edgar Wallace is independent of press criticism ; reviews of his novels merely serve the purpose of indicating to his loyal and enthusiastic public that he has written a new book, and for them that is enough. In just the same way, really " popular " plays do not depend to any but a slight extent on the opinions of dramatic critics. Lyceum melodrama appeals to a public that does not read dramatic criticisms.

On the other hand, and for the same reason, many authors who invariably receive eulogistic reviews cannot boast even respectable sales. It is sometimes hard to convince an author that good reviews do not necessarily

mean good sales. To publishers this is no phenomenon ; but the poor author who plaintively cannot understand that while his book has attracted such favourable notice, it yet has not apparently sold, is sometimes unjustifiably suspicious of the publisher.

This frequently occurs in the case of books of general interest as well as fiction. There is one type of book which usually attracts widespread newspaper attention out of all proportion to its ultimate sales. This is the book which contains a large number of good stories. News editors are always on the look-out for books of this kind and "gut" them mercilessly for the news columns, as distinct from the regular book review columns, on the day of publication. A column or so of liberal quotations from the book is grist to the mill of the news editor. It has been contended that this practice is unfair to the author and publisher, on the ground that readers will not trouble to buy or borrow a book if they can have the cream served up to them in the form of a newspaper article. It is certainly true that the sales of such books cannot be estimated in proportion to the attention they receive in the press. On the other hand, such "reviews" are read by a very large public and are, one may suppose, regarded as an indication of the book's importance. If there is nothing much in the book beyond a number of quotable anecdotes, it is doubtful whether reviews will increase its sales ; but if the book is of such merit that quotation serves the purpose of indicating its quality, it usually happens that it sells on a larger scale as a result of the attention it has received. It all depends on the book.

To the publisher, who is as a rule interested in reviews

of a book only in so far as they will promote its sales, the question of publicity is less important than it is to the author. Sales are the acid test. Although the publisher naturally likes to see his judgment vindicated by favourable reviews of a book, he is above all a business man, and his attitude towards press criticism is naturally determined by the effect it has on a book's sales. The experience of most publishers is that good reviews will help a good book enormously (a "good" book in the sense of a saleable book), and that although good reviews will slightly benefit a "bad" book, they cannot be expected to sell it if it proves to be the kind of book the public will not buy.

As I have already pointed out, publishers are not invariably guided in their choice of books solely by considerations of potential sales. One publisher of my acquaintance said to me recently: "I prefer to publish fiction of quality, what most people call 'highbrow' novels, even if the margin of profit is very small, rather than concentrate on slush; but I must admit I couldn't afford the luxury of pleasing myself if it weren't for So-and-so and So-and-so"—and he named two very popular writers in his list—"who pay my rent and salaries and overhead charges."

The author, however, cannot be expected to view the question of reviews with the detachment of his publisher. Naturally the author likes to feel that appreciative reviews result in more sales, but that is not the only aspect he considers. To him it is of considerable personal importance. The majority of writers are not indifferent to their literary reputation, and reputation, as distinct from income, is undoubtedly created by the critics. But the

author should not lose sight of the fact that although a good press may bring immense personal satisfaction, it by no means follows that the sales of his work will be proportionate.

There are several points of practical detail with which the new author is generally unfamiliar. First, the question of press cuttings. *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book* gives the names and addresses of the best press cutting services. A subscription of about a guinea covers the supply of 100 cuttings on any subject or subjects, and the rate is usually subject to reduction when a larger number is ordered. As it is frequently difficult and consequently more expensive to obtain cuttings from back numbers of papers, it is as well to notify the press cutting agency about a week before the publication of a book, or, if advance notices of either the book or the author are expected, a few days before the release of such material. In special instances the agencies will usually undertake to obtain notices that have appeared before the subscription was taken out, but for this it is customary to pay an increased fee, varying with the difficulty experienced in securing them. It is advisable to keep press cuttings carefully, as after a few months it is often impossible to replace them, back numbers of periodicals often being out of print. Although none of the agencies is infallible, they give surprisingly good service, very few notices escaping their attention.

Then there is the question of photographs. It is customary for many leading photographers to invite authors to a complimentary sitting. This is usually profitable to the photographer in two ways: in the first place, if the author likes the resulting photograph he

often orders some for his personal use (although he is under no obligation to do so), usually paying for them at a reduced professional rate. If the author does not buy any he is usually presented free with one or two finished photographs. Secondly, the photographer is at liberty to sell to the press the right of reproduction of the photograph, receiving a fee from the paper that publishes it. These fees range from 10s. 6d. to as much as four guineas in the London press, and less in the provincial press. Let me say at once that it is very unusual for a paper to pay anything beyond the minimum fee for the privilege of publishing an author's photograph. In the case of actresses and Society women whose beauty renders them eligible for inclusion in the special magazine illustrated supplements a fee of three or four guineas is often paid for the exclusive right of reproduction, but authors do not as a rule qualify in this respect.

Where the photographer retains the copyright, which he always does if the author does not pay for the photograph, he is entitled to sell reproduction rights. The author, however, unless he be so distinguished in his profession that he can afford to disregard the point, should remember that editors are not as a rule likely to pay for the privilege of printing his photograph. Editors are well aware that by publishing an author's photograph they are giving him useful publicity—ergo, why pay for it? As a matter of fact most authors are sensible enough to realise this, and by paying for the photographs that they have taken and thus acquiring the copyright, are in a position to supply prints to any paper that may happen to want them, free of copyright fees—"non-copyright" they are usually called. Some of the leading

photographers also wisely recognise that their prospects of selling photographs of comparatively unknown authors to the press are remote, and are willing to supply prints free for reproduction on condition that the name of the photographer is acknowledged when the picture is published. They, in their turn, are conscious of the commercial value of publicity.

It is inadvisable to supply mounted cabinet portraits for the purpose of press reproduction, because it is more than probable that they will be damaged in their progress through the hands of blockmakers and others; and, again, they are often inconvenient to handle. The most practical plan is to have a number of press prints made from the negative. The photographer will usually be pleased to supply these for a shilling or two per print. These are plain reproductions of the negative on either glossy or matt paper. The art editor much prefers press prints, because he can have them "fouched up" as required.

It may seem unnecessary to warn authors that diminutive "snapshots" are not suitable for the purpose of reproduction, but so many presumably intelligent people seem to think that diminutive or blurred photographs are good enough that it is as well to mention that the requirements of a photograph suitable for press reproduction are, briefly, adequate size, *i.e.*, not less than about 5 by 4 inches, clear definition, and appropriate for the purpose. I mention this last, because quite recently the author of a novel which his publishers described as "a notable contribution to a grave social problem" brought along a snapshot of himself thoroughly enjoying life on a switch-back at a popular seaside resort. For the benefit of the absolutely ignorant I should perhaps add that the size



of a published picture is not necessarily the size of the original print. Usually it is reduced in the process known as blockmaking. These and other technical details will be made clear to the enquiring author by the publicity manager of his publishers.

I have already referred to the imprudent practice of approaching reviewers. There is one point which deserves the young author's careful attention. It is natural, perhaps, when an unfair or unsympathetic review of his book appears that the author should want to write to the reviewer, or to the editor of the paper, to protest against such treatment, and to explain that the reviewer has regarded his book in the wrong light, or has overlooked an important point, or even bitterly to suggest that the reviewer has not read the book at all. On a question of fact, or misquotation, it is both legitimate and advisable for an author to address a brief letter of correction or explanation to the editor; but in any other case it is emphatically unwise for the author to reply to any criticism of his book. The busy reviewer resents it; if the author's view is wrong and his protest merely the expression of his injured pride, the reviewer naturally resents the waste of time; and if by chance there is something to be said on the author's side (who knows? That book may have been skipped—even critics are human) the reviewer probably resents it all the more. No one likes to be told that his judgments are either careless or mistaken. In any case the author who replies to reviewers is so liable to irritate them that the practice is undoubtedly one to be avoided. For the sake of his future books let the author swallow his indignation and keep silent.

It is sometimes hard for the author to realise that a "slating" review is just as likely to sell copies of his book as a column of enthusiastic praise. In his indignation he may overlook the fact that it may be what is known as a good "selling" review. Nowadays the new novelist should be grateful if his book gets any appreciable measure of attention. The good old days when a novel could be sure of lengthy and leisured appreciation from all quarters have vanished. To-day the busy reviewer dips into the new novel—and every day brings a lofty pile into his office—and unless it looks promising to the experienced eye it will probably be dismissed in a few lines, if it gets noticed at all. It is a worse fate to be neglected altogether or damned with faint praise than to be "slated."

Every author is a law unto himself where publicity is concerned. It is in most cases an important aspect of his work and is commercially valuable, and with that we must leave the subject of editorial publicity.

Advertising, although usually controlled by the publisher, is a matter of interest to the author. By advertising I mean, of course, newspaper and other space which is paid for, as distinct from editorial publicity. Authors frequently criticise their publishers' advertising, for the most part because they fail to understand the meaning and value of advertising as applied to books.

Here are a few facts for an author's consideration. The public which reads new books is a very small percentage of the newspaper-reading public; the public which *buys* new books is a still smaller percentage. The effect of book advertisements in a national daily newspaper is negligible compared with advertisements of the same

size offering, say, toothpaste, for the simple reason that the announcement of a new book is wasted on the majority of that newspaper's readers. Everyone has teeth but not everyone is interested in new books. I submit this not as an opinion but as a fact, demonstrated by personal experience over a period of years. That is why publishers' advertising is usually confined to papers which circulate among a cultured public.

It is possible for advertising to stimulate the circulation of a book without selling a single copy to the advantage of publisher or author. If the lending libraries and booksellers are well stocked advertising may "move" these copies but unless the demand increases to the point at which repeat orders come in to the publisher, the money spent on advertising will not benefit the author by a single royalty. How many authors realise this?

In practice advertising does not sell books. Authors find this hard to believe, but experience would convert them. Press advertising is essentially the reflection of a publisher's activities. In itself advertising cannot sell books; it can only help indirectly and then only under certain conditions.

What can advertising do? An announcement of a book by a popular author serves as a reminder to that author's regular readers that his new book is ready. Thus the advertisement acts as an adjunct to reviews and displays of the book in libraries and bookshops. This is simply "reminder" advertising.

In the case of a novel by a new or practically unknown author, how can advertising possibly create a demand? An average of over thirty new novels is published every week in London alone. What chance has the publisher

of tempting you to spend 7s. 6d. on a book by someone you have never heard of when there are already more books than you can possibly read by authors of proved quality ?

Why, then, do publishers advertise at all ? Here are some of the reasons. They hope to impress the trade, especially the libraries. They are advertising their own imprint and current activities. They advertise to please their authors, who naturally are gratified to see their names in bold type with eulogistic extracts from reviews (if available) under the titles of their books. They support the book review pages by contributing to the advertisement revenue of this particular section of the papers. They advertise to attract profitable authors to their lists ; even to please literary agents. And, finally—absurd, if you like, but true—they advertise because other publishers do.

Many publishers believe in the theory of advertising a new book immediately prior to publication and for a few weeks afterwards, thereby hoping to persuade the trade to order copies in anticipation of public demand. Most publishers will readily spend money on a book which is selling well. Such advertising, however, is not cause, but effect.

What does sell books ? The answer is, I think, personal recommendation. Mr. E. F. Benson is credited with saying that he would rather have a dozen influential people talking about his new book at different London dinner tables than see it given a whole-page advertisement in a daily newspaper. The verbal recommendation of a friend is far more potent than the printed opinion of a critic who is a stranger, however expert he may be. I myself have heard many intelligent-looking people in

a big London lending library go up and ask the young ladies in charge of alphabetical sections of subscribers to recommend them "a nice book."

It has been demonstrated again and again by experiment that advertising does not sell books and does not even help to sell books unless other conditions are favourable; and that books can, and do, sell without advertising of any kind whatsoever. A book is a business in itself; it has to create "good will" if it is to be successful. And that good will can only be built up by satisfied readers, that is to say by recommendation. There are hundreds of books which sell thousands of copies every year without a line of advertising; therein lies the proof.

I do not mean to suggest that an author should never ask or expect the publisher to advertise his particular book. He has the right to do so, if only because an undertaking to advertise is an implicit part of the bargain which a publisher makes under present conditions. But an author should not allow vanity, or jealousy, or a misunderstanding of the functions of book advertising, to force an unreasonable claim on the publisher. Most progressive publishers are willing to advertise a book at the right time and in the right media; and although they usually give sympathetic attention to their authors' demands and suggestions, it is only fair that an author for his part should recognise that the publisher is usually more experienced and that it is the publisher's money which is at stake. The business of publishing is, or should be, a partnership between author and publisher, with the obligations and difficulties appreciated by both.

## CHAPTER XII

### WHAT PUBLISHERS WANT

*NOTE.—This chapter contains a statement of individual requirements from publishers. In some instances the views expressed are those of individual members of the firm, but are not less valuable on that account. As all the most important publishers are represented, the symposium should be instructive; and I am much indebted to all the publishers who have kindly contributed to the chapter.*

#### **PHILIP ALLAN AND CO., LTD., Quality House, Great Russell Street, W.C.1.**

While the productions of Philip Allan & Co., Ltd., are not confined to any particular kind of book, it is true that they concentrate on certain classes.

Among these are books of the sea—big illustrated editions of works of maritime history, biographies, yachting and sea adventures generally, and The Nautilus Library, the only pocket series of reprints of famous sea books.

Next come religious books—biographies, and books of devotion, religious history and theology.

Two other types demand attention—books on political and economic subjects, and books on hunting, shooting and fishing—particularly fishing.

But this house finds room for every kind of book on every sort of subject—biographies, memoirs, books about travel, about art, about gardening, *belles lettres*, and a few novels,

carefully selected and reaching a certain standard of literary excellence. Mr. Allan has a particular liking for books in which attractive production is an essential point, and gives to these his personal attention.

**GEORGE ALLEN AND UNWIN, LTD., 40, Museum Street, W.C.1.**

Owing partly to the fact that this firm has grown up out of the amalgamation of four other publishing firms, its scope is an exceptionally wide one, and it would be difficult to find any class of book which is not represented in our list. There are some kinds of books which are represented much more fully than others, but we do not specialise to the exclusion of books on any subject whatever. This firm does not publish any magazines or journals, and consequently short stories or single poems are useless to us. Nor do we care, except under very special circumstances, to publish pamphlets or small books of an ephemeral nature. With these exceptions we publish books on all subjects, and written from all points of view.

**J. W. ARROWSMITH (London), LTD., 57, Gower Street, W.C.1.**

We are interested in most classes of books, but like to choose examples which display qualities of originality and distinction.

In fiction it is individuality, charm and character that attract us, and in the case of that branch of the modern novel known as the "thriller" we look for powers of quick action and excitement calculated to catch and hold attention without undue exertion on the part of the reader. We are keen to meet new writers eager to give expression to vivid thinking in a vigorous style.

Books on big game, natural history, and animals appeal to us, but in the case of the former we prefer the camera as the principal weapon of the hunter, and not the rifle. We have published a number of travel books of the personal interest and adventure type, and are always glad to arrange for others.

In addition, we take pleasure in publishing historical books of real authority and interest which make a permanent contribution to the literature of the period under review.

Being a small firm, we do not have the problem of filling a large list, and in consequence are able to indulge our taste. We are able to give personal attention to authors, who we are always ready to meet on terms of co-operation and friendliness. We like to give care and thought to the production of our books and intelligence to the selling and advertising of them, and wherever possible we believe in giving the book buyer good value for his money.

### **G. BELL AND SONS, LTD., York House, Portugal Street, Kingsway, W.C.2.**

Although we are generally thought of as educational publishers, we have also a large and varied list of books of general literature, and are catholic in our tastes. Almost any book which is not of purely ephemeral interest comes within our orbit: except fiction, which we do not publish. We like to see in our list any book which, by its quality and the presentation of its subject matter, seems to us likely to interest, or serve the needs of, a sufficient, and sufficiently definite, public.

We attach more importance to the author than to his subject, and therefore, providing he has something fresh to say worth saying, and says it well, we are not put off merely because the subject is a hackneyed one. Novelty is not necessarily a passport to success



**ERNEST BENN, LTD., 154, Fleet Street, E.C.4.**

We want the following :

- (a) Books on the fine and applied arts embodying in their text serious research and in their illustrations fine "documents," especially those never reproduced before, *not* "popular" art books, art books hashed up from existing works, or "chatty" books.
- (b) A few good novels and detective stories.
- (c) Biographies and books of essays, poetry and plays which can claim to be of more than ordinary interest.
- (d) Scientific and technical books, written with a view to the requirements of the special markets concerned, *not* "popular" technical or "popular" scientific books, except books which (like Lodge's *Atoms and Rays*) have a serious scientific value as well as a "popular" appeal

**BESANT AND CO., LTD., 21, Orange Street, Leicester Square, W.C.2.**

Every article that is produced or created either has or has not merit ; it stands out of the ruck or it is ordinary. As with motor-cars or cigarettes, so with books—especially, I think, with fiction. Non-fictional works, memoirs, biographies, books on sport or games, and so on can be judged to a great extent on the question of fact ; whether there is sufficient interest to justify the publication—shall we say ?—of a critical survey of the Albigensian Heresies of the fourteenth century, the life of a distinguished diplomatist lately deceased, or a learned dissertation on the comparative value of the leg theory in Test cricket. With fiction, putting aside the works of established men, the choice must be ruled by merit. On this, the final judge is the subscriber to the lending library.

Forty years ago, my father, Walter Besant, upheld the lending libraries, especially the public libraries, at that time just finding their feet. "But," it was urged, "the public will not buy your books, they will borrow them." "True," he would say, "then they will read much more." The lending libraries have produced readers in their thousands, and to-day the great reading public has become discriminating to a degree that, looking back on some of the book successes thirty years ago, one would have hardly thought possible. It is, I think, a fact that the "best-seller" of fiction to-day is rarely found among what is loosely described as "good popular stuff." One would hardly place in that category *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* or *High Wind in Jamaica*. Yet such is what the public, this discriminating public of to-day, demands and demands with no uncertain voice.

#### A. AND C. BLACK, LTD., 4, 5 and 6, Soho Square, W.1.

Messrs. Black were the pioneers of the modern colour book, of which they now issue an extensive and popular series. They also publish the Menpes Series of great Masters in colour facsimile, which represent some of the finest examples of British colour engraving and printing.

They issue an important series of books of reference, comprising that well-known annual biographical dictionary *Who's Who*, perhaps the most indispensable reference book, *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book*, *Black's Medical Dictionary*, *Black's Veterinary Dictionary*, *Books that Count*, *Dictionary of Pictures and Gardening Dictionary* and *Careers for Our Sons*.

Messrs. Black also publish many books on general literature, science, history, travel, boys' books and social works, and suggestions on these lines will always be carefully considered.

**BLACKIE AND SON, LTD., 50, Old Bailey, E.C.4.**

This firm specialises in scientific, technical and mathematical works, as well as educational text books of all kinds. Their children's books cover a wide range: nursery rhymes, fairy tales, verses for children, school and adventure stories for girls and boys—besides which Blackie's publish a series of world-famous annuals.

Competently written and interesting travel books, *belles lettres*, and critical and historical studies are always given careful consideration.

**BASIL BLACKWELL, 49, Broad Street, Oxford.**

Our interests are wide, but we specialise in school books: books of academic interest, on the one hand; and on the other, by virtue of our association with the Shakespeare Head Press, in finely printed and bound books in limited editions.

**WM. BLACKWOOD AND SONS, LTD., 37, Paternoster Row, E.C.4, and 45, George Street, Edinburgh.**

This firm undertakes works in general literature—history, biography, travel, criticism, etc. Fiction by new writers is carefully considered, stress being laid on the literary quality of the work submitted. Juvenile books and “domestic” fiction are not solicited. *Blackwood's Magazine*, conducted by this firm, offers to unknown writers a valuable opening for articles, sketches, and stories of varying length. The magazine is not illustrated, and articles based merely on compilation are not acceptable.

**GEOFFREY BLES, 22, Suffolk Street, S.W.1.**

The success of Mr. Michael Joseph's book gives me the opportunity of revising for this new edition the opinions which I was rash enough to express when I had only been publishing for about a year. However, in general the position is the same. Like other publishers, I am still looking for good books, although now I think I am more interested in literary merit than in "sales"—for, if the book is good, I find that in most cases the "sales" follow!

Fiction is, perhaps, the most fascinating material for a publisher, and I welcome any novel that has any interesting or distinctive features—especially "First Novels." W. F. Morris's *Bretherton* was a "First Novel," and nearly 5,000 copies were sold *before publication*, which I am told is a record.

Another class of book in which I am particularly interested is the more modern type of biography, such as Lewis May's *Cardinal Newman*, and Beatrice Curtis Brown's *Anne Stuart, Queen of England*. I have in preparation several more fine biographies of this kind.

I am still able to resist the temptation to publish poetry, collections of short stories, and such profound works as *The Plumber's Vade-Mecum*.

**BURNS OATES AND WASHBOURNE, LTD., 43-45,  
Newgate Street, E.C.1.**

During the eighty years that Burns Oates and Washbourne has been established the firm has attracted some of the most famous writers of the day, and its catalogues include the works of many leading authors on both religious and secular subjects.

Burns Oates and Washbourne has been largely concerned in the publication of books of interest to the English-speaking Catholic community, and its traditional policy in this connection remains unchanged ; but our interests are by no means entirely religious, and we are extending our activities in the field of general literature.

We will publish any book provided it is not anti-Catholic. Biography, history, *belles lettres*, and even good fiction would be suitable for our list.

**THORNTON BUTTERWORTH, 15, Bedford Street,  
Strand, W.C.2.**

Apart from medical and law works there is no limit to the sort of books I want—except that they must be good in the sense that they possess that indefinable quality, human interest, or that they serve some really useful purpose. I much prefer an excellent book by a new and quite unknown author to an inferior or average book by one who is so famous that his name would shine in my list like a star. That I pride myself also on seeing some of the best work of famous writers issue from my house goes without saying ; but every MS. that comes to me, even though it bears the marks of having been turned away from many doors, has the fullest and most careful consideration ; consequently, I do not remember that, so far, I have ever let one slip through my fingers that I have subsequently had reason to feel sorry I lost. Dickens tells us how, in fear and trembling, one dark night, when he could not be seen, he dropped his first MS. into a publisher's letter-box ; and I am still undisillusioned enough to hope that when I am untying a parcel from a new novelist, that I may be entertaining another Dickens unawares, and I give him every attention accordingly. More often than not, I confess, I have

been disappointed ; but the hope that any day may bring another book of the kind I am looking for, and the fact that some days do, keep my interest in the search unflaggingly alive. That is the fascination of publishing—like a miner, one is picking his way through a dreary waste of worthless stuff, and the next stroke may uncover a vein of gold. Perhaps because of the pains I take to discover the right thing, whenever I publish a book I feel as much concern for its welfare as if I had written it myself ; if it fails to win the success it deserves (as even the best books will at times), I am more sorry on the author's account than I am on my own ; for, after all, a publisher publishes many books in a season ; he does not, like the author, carry all his eggs in one basket.

If I may mention a few of the books I naturally pride myself on having published—Mrs. Asquith's *Memoirs* ; Mr. Winston Churchill's brilliant work, *The World Crisis* ; Mr. Arthur Weigall's studies in Egyptology ; Clare Sheridan's *Nuda Veritas* ; Lord Beaverbrook's *Politicians and the War* ; General von Seeckt's *The Future of the German Empire* ; Trotsky's *My Life* ; the novels and stories of W. B. Maxwell, Stephen McKenna, John Russell, Mary Johnston, Ibanez, Thomas Burke, and Richard Dehan, to say nothing of history, natural history, sport, travel, art—these are the sort of books I want ; these, and, as I say, books of practically every description if only they have real qualities of interest and workmanship to recommend them. A dull book is its own condemnation. Everything is interesting, and however wide an author's knowledge may be, however sound his scholarship, if he cannot write interestingly on any subject he has made his own, he has not really mastered his art, and he is not for me. To be inaccurate is the eighth deadly sin, and to be accurate but dull is the ninth. Probably I shall never get all the books I want, but I have got a good many of them, and if I don't get a good many more it will not be my fault, but the fault of the authors who do not write them, or do not give me an opportunity of seeing them.

My ambition is not to have an enormous list, but a list in which there shall be nothing that will not help to strengthen the general reader's faith in my imprint.

**CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, Fetter Lane,  
E.C.4.**

The function of a University Press differs in some degree from that of a private commercial house. It exists partly for the purpose of producing works of learning which might fail to find a publisher elsewhere. The Cambridge University Press has been in existence almost since the invention of printing, and included in its list of authors such names as Erasmus, Milton, and Newton in past centuries, and Jeans, Eddington and Quiller-Couch in this.

In addition to works of learning and university and school text-books, the Press publishes works in every field of literature and science, with the exception of fiction; but it publishes nothing which is not approved by the Syndics, a committee of the University. It is sometimes supposed that the Press is subsidised to perform these functions; but this is not the case. It is organised on sound commercial lines and aims at earning reasonable trading profits which may be devoted to the publication of unremunerative books, or to other university purposes. That it has been able to do this has been due to the successful publication of school books such as the famous Pitt Press Series, which led the way in the modern development of this branch of the book trade.

In common with the other two privileged Presses, the Cambridge University Press shares the sole right to print the Authorised Version of the Bible and Prayer Books, and it has shared with the Oxford University Press alone the privilege of printing the Revised Version.

Another way in which the University Presses differ from other firms is that they combine the business of publishing and

printing. It is proper that a Press which was renowned in the eighteenth century for the Bibles and Prayer Books printed by John Baskerville should have taken so prominent a part in the modern revival of fine printing. Mr. Bruce Rogers and, more recently, Mr. Stanley Morison, have acted as typographical advisers to the Press, and have done much at Cambridge to raise the standard of English printing.

### **JONATHAN CAPE, LTD., 30, Bedford Square, W.C.1.**

Our primary need is for books that really are books, and are neither machine-made stuff compiled with paste and scissors, nor last novels by moribund authors who used once to "sell." While we publish many novels, we publish also, and are particularly interested in, that class of books loosely described as "General Literature." In this category we include volumes of reminiscence, not of the variety described by Sir Edmund Gosse as "bloated biography," but books which from the point of view of interest are worth the time and labour of writing, and which have in addition genuine literary value. We should include under this heading such books as Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*. We do not exclude more definitely historical books, several of which appear in our catalogue. Volumes of essays are welcomed, and so are books to which can only be applied that curious description *belles lettres*; books, that is to say, comparable to Mr. Percy Lubbock's *Earlham*.

Poetry is always supposed to be difficult to sell. It may be, but we are interested in it and have had some measure of success. Our announcement lists usually include two or three volumes of poems.

What we always look for in works of fiction is originality, definite literary quality, and what we consider to be an appeal which will spread outwards from the literary coteries and



cliques to a much larger public. A difficult combination, but not impossibly rare. To us the name of the author matters little. If he, or she, has written other books, so much the better, if not, he probably will and we shall then have solid foundations on which to build in the future. We are not afraid of volumes of short stories; our catalogue contains a large variety of them. We have published a number of books translated from foreign languages, and several more are projected. In this connection we should like to utter two words of warning to would-be translators. First, the fact that a book has been sold by hundreds of thousands in the country of origin does not necessarily mean that it will have any appeal to English readers. Secondly, we are particular about the quality of any translations we publish. They must, in short, be English.

During the last few years a much larger proportion of American books have appeared in English editions. We can claim to have been responsible for this to some considerable extent. The same standards have, of course, been applied to the American as to the English books on our list. Only a few years ago all American books were regarded with the utmost suspicion in this country, but the success of such books as Mr. Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* and *Martin Arrowsmith* and Mr. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* have modified that attitude very considerably. We, at all events, continue to publish and to sell many American books, and see no reason to vary our policy. We are always interested in books—either fiction or non-fiction—from the Dominions, and have many such in our catalogue, from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

**CASSELL AND CO., LTD., La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C.4.**

“We want to publish any books that anybody wants to read. If it is a novel and has a real story we want it, provided

it is not salacious. If it is a book of memoirs it must be a book that will interest outside the writer's family. If it is a biography of someone, it must be a biography with a new viewpoint. If a writer came to me with a life of Christ that was new, I would publish it ; if he came with a novel, the plot of which was the oldest under the sun, but had a new angle, I would publish it.

"The new angle, the different method of treating anything, is what I want. Both fiction and biographies are becoming set and staid in their treatment and limitation. Writers are afraid to get out of the rut.

"It may not be their fault. I don't know. But as a publisher I say that I am looking for the man or woman who has a new vision, even if it be on the oldest theme in the world.

"We are tired of sex novels, we are tired of imitations of Mrs. Gaskell. We want in our books life as we live it, with all its romance, its humanity, in imitation of nobody, but with a clear-cut recording of ourselves. We love to read about ourselves when the writer knows us as we really are."

—MR. NEWMAN FLOWER.

### THE CAYME PRESS, LTD., 21, Soho Square, W.1.

"You ask me how to get a book published, to give you a recipe, not for a 'best-seller' (thank you for that!), but for a book that would win my attention as a publisher.

"My own happiest moments with MSS. are when reading induces a certain emotional response that seeks outlet (for I am not one of your cold critics who can unerringly analyse and coldly express the results of the analysis), firstly, in some quite banal expression of delight, and, secondly, in a desire to

arise and get on with my business of publishing this find. That seems, perhaps, to beg the question, but it is the only way I can suggest the need there is for a writer to get into the work, if he can, a dash of an indefinable quality which one can only call, in borrowed phrase, 'It.' 'It' may, of course, come from supreme talent, and supreme talent may override many technical weaknesses. In general, however, it is likely to come from competent shaping of the material, to the purpose for which it is intended. It *gets* there. Most important to-day is topicality, the being in touch with things-as-they-are. Don't think I am asking you to accept them. By no means. You can attack them to your heart's desire and pour scorn upon all, but do, do remain 'in touch.' Don't, by the way, if the spirit moves you, shun the most pedestrian of writings. We publishers are catholic in our tastes and will rejoice heartily over a manuscript that 'gets there' be it novel, drama, biography, utilitarian guide or cookery book, or even economic study. Try to throw light into some corner of life, but try first to see it yourself.

"That a MS. should stir in the publisher some emotional response is to my mind vitally important. In our humble way we are creators, and creation requires the emotional stimulus. We have to give the book its material form, shepherd it through the paths of production and distribution. To do so and to inspire staff, buyers and public with our belief in a book, that belief must have some very vital basis that can spring only from emotion stirred. That spring of emotion in the publisher is most likely to be touched if you have felt it yourself in the writing.

"Set about your theme, then. Get well inside it, set it down in your chosen form, and pray that you have got some personality into it, that you have managed to convey the fact that you are somebody saying something that matters. If you succeed you will find your publisher."

—MR. HUMPHREY TOULMIN.

**CHAPMAN AND HALL, LTD., 11, Henrietta Street,  
Covent Garden, W.C.2.**

"Whatever a publisher may say for the purposes of proclamation, the fact remains that what all publishers want is the book that will sell. The difficulty, of course, is to spot a seller in advance. Our own firm is always on the look-out for new writers of talent, and we may claim to have introduced not a few to the public, to our own and the public's advantage. We want good volumes of reminiscences, adventure and sport. We are particularly anxious to add to our list as many reference works as possible, and our organisation permit us to make a quick decision on the likely sales of such volumes, from the synopsis, and to commission books on this basis. Our technical and scientific side is now one of the largest branches of the business. During the last few years we have published many of the most successful scientific works of the time."

—MR. JOHN L. BALE.

**CHATTO AND WINDUS, 97 and 99, St. Martin's Lane,  
W.C.2.**

Every publisher who is deeply interested in his business regards it rather as a pleasure than a "fatigue." Our own pleasure lies quite simply in the publication of books of good literary quality. Our announcement lists and catalogues will show what we mean. The books may be works of imagination : novels, poems, plays. They may be contributions to history, biography, art or science ; or contributions to criticism and scholarship. (Books on purely technical, scientific and educational subjects we do not attempt.) Or, again, they may fall under the wide categories of *belles lettres* and "general." But whatever the book, whether it be the life of an eminent person or a novel, whether it be on music

or on sport, it may be taken as one that has given us pleasure to publish, and one that we believe does reach a certain standard of general excellence and literary distinction.

It would be absurd to ignore the financial side of business. At least a modicum of prosperity is necessary to enable you to publish what you want. But we do not insist on "popular" and "best-selling" qualities above all others. We have thus declined bad books and books which we did not like, and we have not been dismayed by their subsequent success elsewhere. Conversely, we are not unduly disturbed by the apparent failure of books we have published; we have faith in them and feel sure they will compel attention in the long run. There is a great deal of luck in the reception of a book by the public.

We are not afraid of authors because they are unlucky, and are glad to stick to them as long as they wish to stick to us. From this it follows that we are not shy to make experiments. We do not, however, publish for the sake of publishing, in order to swell out our turnover, and so it happens that during some seasons we publish more than during others.

Our interest in our publications is a very personal one. We take great pains over the production and appearance of our books, and whatever we publish we endeavour to sell and push to the best of our ability, for we consider that it is not fair to an author to take up his work if we are not ready to do our best for it in every way.

## CHRISTOPHERS, 22, Berners Street, W.1.

The firm is primarily concerned with text books for secondary education, in all departments of which we seek work of the best type. In addition, books of a more advanced character (particularly in history, geography, science and philosophy) and on general subjects of wide interest are included in our list.

**W. COLLINS, SONS, AND CO., LTD., 48, Pall Mall,  
S.W.1.**

Like all other publishers, we long to find a genius. The Conrads and Galsworthys of the future are what we hungrily seek. We are always searching, with perhaps credulous optimism, in the books submitted to us, for that flash of creative genius which signifies the arrival of a new comet. Such discoveries are the publisher's chief compensation, for what finer thrill can he have than that of producing over his imprint the first work of a creative artist of the highest calibre (provided, of course, that that creative artist can be securely tied up)? However, we have to be content with the following modest ambitions:

(1) To discover a genuine humourist, that rarest bird. What a fortune there is waiting for a really funny fellow!

(2) To light upon a lady, or possibly a gentleman, who will reproduce at regular intervals, well told, well constructed tales of sentiment, what highbrows describe as "tripe." It may be tripe, but it must be sincere genuine tripe, and not synthetic tripe.

(3) To find and develop the born detective writer, and the capacity to construct a tale of murder—it should be murder—a flawless masterpiece of deduction and analysis is horribly rare.

What don't we want?

We tremendously don't want any more of those deceptive autobiographists, the One Book folk, who put everything they have ever experienced, everybody and everything they have ever loved, hated and observed, into 70,000 words, and for evermore type away in vain.

**CONSTABLE AND CO., LTD., 10-12, Orange Street,  
W.C.2.**

Messrs. Constable, as publishers of general literature, technical and medical books, are always interested in

manuscripts of quality, whether they are written by established authors who, having big sales, already expect considerable contracts, or by aspirants who have something particular to say or some individual way of saying what has been said before.

Messrs. Constable have no elementary school book list, no juvenile department in the ordinary sense, and do not publish more than about thirty novels a year. Subject, however, to these limitations, they want good books of all sorts and try to give careful *and quick* consideration to manuscripts submitted.

**J. M. DENT AND SONS, LTD., Aldine House, 10-13,  
Bedford Street, Strand, W.C.2.**

Our general publications are miscellaneous in character with a bias in favour of work of literary rather than technical interest; we publish fiction; we are the publishers of "Everyman's Library" and other reprints of the classics under modern editorship; we have an educational business which covers all the main branches of school-work; in our own printing and binding factory at Letchworth we are able to supervise our production in every detail; and we have a house in Toronto which works on the same principles as the London headquarters.

**NOEL DOUGLAS, 38, Great Ormond Street, W.C.1.**

Mr. Noel Douglas is a composite individual, born in 1925 of The Labour Publishing Company, Ltd. (now deceased) and named after his godfathers, B. Noel Langdon-Davies and G. Douglas H. Cole. In 1929 the business was acquired by Williams & Norgate, Ltd., who, while combining the management with their own business, have maintained the distinctive imprint and character of the list. The most outstanding

feature of it in the early days was the Noel Douglas Replicas, which are photographic reproductions of historic first editions, such as Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. A few limited editions, a series of selections from lyric poets and some other books of poems constitute this section.

In regard to fiction, while he has no objection to "best-sellers," he is not prepared to "play down" to popular weaknesses, and aims at a small number of books of a high standing. Then he adventures boldly into books on such subjects as the nudity movement, birth control and divorce, to say nothing of contract bridge, woodcraft and sometimes unorthodox economics and politics. It will be seen that, despite his elusive personality, he is a very live and questing fellow.

**GERALD DUCKWORTH AND CO., LTD., 3, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2.**

Our aim is to make a financial success for our authors and ourselves of all the books we publish, whether fiction, biography, history, travel, drama, art, science, or *belles lettres*. We are always ready to publish what is "popular," and we are also ready to take a risk in what may at first seem "unpopular." We are not prejudiced against a book because it is out of the ordinary, or because it may express an unusual point of view. On the contrary, it is for books of this kind that we are always on the look-out. It is our experience that this breadth of view, although it may not necessarily lead to the small profits and quick returns upon which certain professions rely, is in the long run well advised. It is our policy to keep in personal touch with our authors and to study their wishes, especially in the production and appearance of their books. When we undertake a book's publication it means we believe in it, and we spare neither time nor pains to make it a success.



**FABER AND FABER, LTD., 24, Russell Square, W.C.1.**

“ The best answer to your question is to refer your readers to our current catalogue, which we are always glad to send to anyone who asks for it. This would give a better idea of the range and character of our publications than any brief description can. There is a consistency, an individuality, in any serious publisher's list, which is more easily felt than defined. However, I am glad to attempt a few observations upon the policy and scope of our business.

“ We never publish for the sake of publishing ; conversely, we publish nothing that we do not consider good of its kind. We take great pains over the choice of our books ; our list is the result of a continuous process of personal discussion and selection. Every MS. and suggestion submitted to us, however apparently crude or worthless, is seriously treated ; nothing is rejected which has not been considered by at least two of our directors, and usually (if it has any merit at all) by all the directors. But we do not require unanimity between the directors before the publication of a book is authorised. As a rule, we find ourselves unanimous ; but it fairly often happens that we publish a book upon which our opinions are divided. This (as we think) makes for elasticity and presents prejudices hardening into a rule of thumb. Certainly it gives a special chance to the unknown author, or the unusual book.

“ We do not publish books merely because we ‘like’ them, but because we think them good, or able, or important—a very different thing ; mere personal preference is a feeble guide. Naturally we consider their saleability ; but we adhere to the best tradition of English publishing by producing a few books every year upon which we cannot expect any profit. We are not especially impressed by ‘names’ ; we would always rather publish a good book by an unknown author than a bad book by a famous one, and we are, of course, always on the look-out for ‘promise.’ Generally we aim at the quality which we call ‘relevance’ ; that is, we seek

to publish books which relate to the needs of the age. Beyond mere relevance we aim, further, at permanence ; that is, we seek books of lasting quality and value.

" We set no bounds to the scope of our business ; there is no kind of book in which we are not interested—all that we ask is that it should be good of that kind, whether it be an account of the Test matches or a treatise on political philosophy.

" Fiction needs a few words to itself. We look for three essential qualities—sincerity, distinction of writing, distinction of subject. We have no use for drivel, even if it looks like being successful drivel. We like the novel of wit, intelligence, and insight ; the novel of feeling ; the novel of adventure ; in short, any novel which is a novel, and not (as Arnold Bennett would say) a ' bath-bun.'

" One aspect of our business deserves separate mention. In connection with the *Criterion* (edited by Mr. T. S. Eliot) we publish a certain number of books which explore the least obvious but deeply important intellectual and spiritual currents of the present time. We have also been successful in reviving, through the *Criterion Miscellany*, an art which seemed dead—the art of pamphleteering. I mention this particularly because it marks, most definitely, the character of the policy we would wish to be known as ours—a policy receptive to new ideas, yet tenacious of good traditions."

—MR. GEOFFREY FABER.

**VICTOR GOLLANCZ, LTD., 14, Henrietta Street,  
W.C.2.**

" I am not interested in technical books.

" I am not interested in works devoid of both literary and intellectual merit, even if I were reasonably sure that such a work were likely to have a very big sale.

" With these two exceptions I am interested in every kind of book. Though I make many mistakes, I try to publish only such books as have definite distinction in one or other of the several categories in which 'distinction' may be classed. For instance, I would eagerly publish a book which convincingly expressed a fine and original idea, even if the book were badly written ; and with less eagerness I would publish a book more commonplace in idea, if the writing were of great distinction and beauty (this is a rare category of book, but I think such a description might justly apply to one of the great 'best-sellers' of the last three or four years). The book, of course, which one publishes with the greatest eagerness is the book which has distinction in a number of different ways.

" I also like to publish a few really good books every year, for which only a very small sale can be anticipated, and which are likely, therefore, to involve one in considerable financial loss. I don't care to publish more than about six of such books a year, as the ideal publishing business appears to me to be that in which, if one may put it so, the commercial and professional elements are perfectly mingled—that is to say, the publishing business which produces the highest proportion of *good* books that *sell*."—MR VICTOR GOLLANCZ.

**GEORGE G. HARRAP AND CO., LTD., 39-41, Parker Street, Kingsway, W.C.2.**

" To the question put to me by Mr. Michael Joseph, 'What books do you want, and what books do you *not* want for your list ?' I would like to reply that I want good books, and that I don't want bad ones. I feel, however, that a clearer definition is necessary, and so, if I may, I will make the attempt.

" The list of works published by my House is not restricted to any particular subject. I am ambitious and am always hopeful of seeing our imprint upon books that are a definite

contribution to literature, whether the subject be educational, general, travel or fiction.' Although I welcome works of already established authors, for I feel that these are needed to give strength to a publisher's list, I don't close the door to the unknown writer who has his or her position to make—rather do I welcome the opportunity of examining work by beginners that has been conscientiously and seriously done.

"I have little time for literature whose only merit is sensationalism, or which appeals solely to the senses. This I would leave to others.

"There is a large fiction public awaiting really good love stories and tales of adventure; just as there is a healthy demand for stories of travel into unknown parts. These are the type of books that I want, and, in addition, literature of a general character which can be honestly and enthusiastically recommended to the public."—MR. GEORGE S. HARRAP.

### **HODDER AND STOUGHTON, LTD., St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, E.C.4.**

The publisher wants two things. He wants to publish books that redound to the credit of his House. He wants to publish books that the public wants to read. It is our opinion that these two aspirations are perhaps easier to harmonise to-day than they have ever been in the past. The immense increase during the last ten years of the number of people who like to read good books shows that the general standard of literary taste is by no means degenerating.

The successful writer is always the one who looks beyond the publisher to the public. The best advice that we can offer to any author whose position is not yet assured is to know the books which are in demand on the tables of the leading book-sellers and upon the shelves of the great circulating libraries, and, with that knowledge, to write his own book in his own way.

**MARTIN HOPKINSON, LTD., 23, Soho Square, W.1.**

We are glad to consider all books, other than purely technical works, which reach a certain standard of general interest and literary distinction. We are specially interested in the following classes of books : fiction, travel, the sea and ships, gardening, biography, *belles lettres*, religion, science, social and political questions, economics and general literature with some element of permanent value. We are also glad to consider translations of foreign books of general literary merit.

**GERALD HOWE, LTD., 23, Soho Square, W.1.**

We are interested in distinguished work in fiction, biography, questions of the day, and science for the general reader. As a small firm we are able to give a great deal of attention to all the details of production which give a book individuality.

**HURST AND BLACKETT, LTD., 55, Fleet Street,  
E.C.4**

Messrs. Hurst and Blackett are always prepared to consider fiction of all kinds. While style is not without its importance, it is essential that all novels submitted should have, as far as possible, a strong and original plot. First novels receive every consideration. Special attention is given to detective, adventure and mystery stories, and the novel dealing with modern social problems and relationships. Books of travel and memoirs are given great prominence in Messrs. Hurst and Blackett's lists of publications. These can be of a very varied nature, but should always be of an interesting character and attractive style, and, as far as possible, off the

beaten track. In the case of biographies, books dealing with lesser known but interesting characters of the past and more prominent people and problems of to-day are most likely to be accepted. Original and good illustrations should be submitted when possible with all works of non-fiction. This firm is especially interested in books of a general nature dealing with themes of an unusual and startling character. Any MS., however, which has a wide appeal will be given every consideration.

**HUTCHINSON AND CO. (Publishers), LTD., 34,  
Paternoster Row, E.C.4.**

Messrs. Hutchinson and Company are ready to consider works of every description. Novels dealing with modern themes are especially acceptable, as are mystery, adventure and historical stories with strong original plots. It has always been the policy of this firm to encourage new authors. First novels are therefore welcomed. Besides fiction, the range of MSS. accepted is very wide. Autobiographies and books of memoirs dealing with personalities of interest to the public are required. Biographies and reminiscences of a political, social, literary, military and sporting nature also receive favourable consideration. *Belles lettres* and essays of real literary value find a prominent place in Messrs. Hutchinson's list. In addition to the foregoing, Nature books, popular science, travel and adventure, and the lives of prominent historical characters, written in an interesting manner from the personal point of view, always stand a good chance of acceptance. In all suitable non-fiction works, photographs or other illustrations are a desirable feature. Books on sport, written from a popular standpoint, are welcome, as indeed are all books with a wide and popular appeal including juveniles.

**JARROLD'S, Publishers (London), LTD., Paternoster House, Paternoster Row, E.C.4.**

You give us a very wide question to answer in a very short space : for we are open to publish any category of literature, except highly technical books or special art monographs.

In so far as one can postulate *in vacuo* the desirable qualities in a MS., we emphatically do *not* want—this is rather a negative postulate—books written with the definite object of becoming “best-sellers”; if for no other reason than because we strongly hold the view that a work written solely with that object can, with the rarest exceptions, never achieve it. It is time that the legend of the completely cynical best-selling author were exploded, even though many of them fondly pretend to answer to that description. “Writing down to the public” is, in point of fact, no better for the pocket than it is for the soul.

It was in this belief that our Jay Library was founded, a series consisting for the most part, as you know, of novels which publishers’ readers who “know what the public want” could praise, but not recommend as likely financial successes, and of which the authors themselves in many cases despaired, on the grounds that their work lacked what are supposed to be the recognised insignia of large sales. The success of this library, about which so many people were sceptical, has encouraged us to continue it indefinitely.

At the other pole, we are on the look-out for really good novels of any kind—especially mystery stories. Mystery stories can, of course, be frankly “thrillers,” like some of Poe’s, or elaborate jig-saw puzzles like many of the Sherlock Holmes stories. In either case, they require the greatest technical skill, for their regular public (which is well known to be surprisingly highbrow in its composition) is hyper-critical and discerning.

Thirdly, as the publishers of *Black Beauty*, we are

inclined still to cherish a long tradition in animal stories, Nature books, and most kinds of children's books.

To sum up in general, what has already, I am afraid, been a series of vague generalisations, we are anxious for any sincere piece of work by any author, known or unknown.

### **HERBERT JENKINS, LTD., 3, York Street, S.W.1.**

Our first requirement is a manuscript worthy of our name as a publishing firm, and suitable to our lists, whether it is by a well-known author or not is immaterial provided it is of a high standard. It is our aim to make our productions as attractive as possible, not only from their outside appearance, but also the matter they contain inside.

We endeavour to make our books somewhat different from the general run ; in binding and jackets we make a bid for originality, thus hoping to attract the attention of prospective readers.

Owing to the fact that we have had a measure of success with humorous books, we have gained for ourselves a name as publishers of this type of fiction. Proud as we are of this reputation, we would point out that this is far from being the only form of literature with which we have been successful. Our lists announce biographies, books on art, antiques and travel, and books for garden-lovers and sportsmen, as well as others, too many to mention here.

We are always on the look-out for new authors of promise, as the history of the firm clearly indicates, for from time to time we have made some extremely valuable " discoveries " who, in their turn, have stood by us loyally.

To sum up, we might add, that just as the craftsman of old put his heart and soul into his work, so do we of the House of the Green Label put all our knowledge and experience, gained from years of publishing, into every new publication.



**JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, LTD., Vigo Street, W.**

This firm, which has always been particularly noted for its introduction of original and enterprising talent to the public, is interested in practically all kinds of work, except educational, economic, religious and technical publications. Interesting memoirs, biographies and reminiscences, books of travel, adventure and topography, books on art and artists, music and the drama, poetry, plays, criticism, *belles lettres* and fiction of all kinds are features of their lists, and all MSS. falling under these headings will receive careful consideration. They are also interested in foreign translations of suitable books and in any original and distinctive work submitted by artists and illustrators.

**T. WERNER LAURIE, LTD., 24-26, Water Lane, Blackfriars, E.C.4.**

We have a market for household books, cookery, health, etiquette, domestic economy, etc., and we can also use books on topography (cathedrals, churches, old inns, etc.). We publish "collectors' " books on china, old glass, furniture, and other kindred subjects. We can also use travel books, books on occultism, and bright fiction.

We are *not* interested in MSS. on theology, juveniles, nor scientific books, school books, political economy or philosophy.

The following are some of the many famous authors for whom we have published : Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, George Moore, Barry Pain, Eden Phillpotts and W. B. Yeats.

**JOHN LONG, LTD., 34, Paternoster Row, E.C.4.**

Messrs. John Long Ltd., are particularly interested in works of fiction of a popular type. The aim of this firm is to

satisfy the demand for those novels which appeal to the widest circle of readers, and therefore the requirements vary with the trend of modern ideas. Messrs. John Long, Ltd. are always pleased to welcome manuscripts from new authors, and their efficient organisation offers every facility for giving the required help that is necessary in the case of first novels. In addition to works of fiction, they are willing to consider books of travel, biographies of prominent persons, and general literature of an interesting character.

**LONGMANS GREEN AND CO., LTD., 39, Paternoster Row, E.C.4.**

Like all other publishers, we are on the look-out for writers of distinction.

On the technical, scientific, and educational sides of our business the problem of the right book to publish, and of the best author to do the writing of it, is comparatively easy, for the market for such books can, after many years of experience, be determined, as can also their required scope and contents.

In general literature the problem is different and more difficult, for public taste changes more quickly than is generally realised, and the great problem for a publishing company—which is not “here to-day and gone to-morrow”—is to gauge this taste, to see beyond the purely ephemeral or merely deplorable and to discover and cater for the more permanent changes in the taste of the general reading public.

What, therefore, gives us real pleasure is the reading of a manuscript which reflects the best of our modern tendencies and, while being far removed from the dull and heavy, yet shows keen insight and the power of writing.

We want, in short, manuscripts and authors with the modern outlook, and with a sincere determination to see the world as it really is.

**MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD., St. Martin's Street,  
W.C.2.**

We have published works by Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, Lord Morley, Mr. James Stephens, Mr. William Butler Yeats, Mr. Hugh Walpole and many others such as these, and like to undertake the publication of important books of all kinds whenever we can get them.

**ELKIN MATHEWS AND MARROT, LTD., Bloomsbury  
Street, W.C.1.**

Publishing is a profession (or trade) like another, and it may therefore be taken for granted that the publisher's primary object is to make money in the largest possible quantities. But in publishing, even to a higher degree than in other forms of business, keenness and personal interest are essential to success. Theoretically, therefore, the literary worth of a book is immaterial so long as it is a money-maker ; but in practice the publisher who is worth his salt will not be content with so ignoble a standard. It is much more fun to publish a good book than a bad one, and if you don't find publishing fun you had much better immediately give it up and try something else ; and, in rare but satisfactory accordance with the laws of poetic justice, the publisher who puts quality first is the man who alone has any chance of success. The first thing, then, that we would say for ourselves is just that : that the first question to be answered of any book that enters this office is whether it has quality or not, for to us the commercial aspect, though vital, is secondary.

Any good book, therefore, is potential grist to our mill, provided that it is not too specialised or technical—any book, in fact, of which we feel that our belief in it and the system of our selling organisation will enable us to do it justice. Fiction, *belles lettres*, memoirs, criticism, biography, bibliography,

education and every allied subject come within our scope ; nor are we afraid of work by unknown authors : indeed, first novels of merit seem to us more desirable discoveries than second or third books. Quite apart from considerations of business, it happens to be better fun to start a writer on his way than to pick him up from somebody else's chariot. On the other hand, we should like at this stage to make a disclaimer : we are no longer specialists—or anything like it—in verse and poetic drama ; many years ago this was to some extent the case, but though we hope we still maintain our reputation in this province, the state of affairs has long been altered, though a vague impression to the contrary seemed till comparatively recently to linger in certain quarters. We have also a predilection for books on political and social problems (as our *Autumn Owl and Moon* will show) ; being great believers in the system of commissioning books, we are always glad to discuss proposed books on important topics with authors or agents.

One of the pleasantest sides of publishing is that of production, and, feeling as we do, we enjoy doing our best to make our volumes personable and appropriate to their contents. Finally, we may add that every manuscript submitted to us receives the consideration it deserves ; we are much too afraid of missing something good (that nightmare of every publisher) to think of taking any other course !

**METHUEN AND CO., LTD., 36, Essex Street, W.C.2.**

As we do not specialise, except in topography and essays, our wants are easily described : we want entertaining and informative books in general literature, with perhaps emphasis on biography, reminiscence and travel, and, on the scholastic side, trustworthy works in every branch of education.

Novelists who devote themselves to the minute analysis of sexual emotions would probably save time if they sent their MSS. to other firms.

**MILLS AND BOON, LTD., 29, Rupert Street, W.1.**

We are interested in fiction, general literature of a popular nature, and educational books.

We are particularly keen on new authors.

**JOHN MURRAY, 50, Albemarle Street, W.1.**

“What we want is what every publisher wants, a steady stream of books which are good literature and good sellers. Unfortunately these two qualities very often do not coincide, and the result is a compromise—a certain number of really high-class books (which deserve publication but which at best cannot hope to do more than cover expenses) and a larger number of popular ones which are sound and healthy reading, even if not so high class. What no publisher should want is a morally harmful book, however great its sale may be, and heavy responsibility rests on anyone who takes such a book. We have always rather specialised in history and biography and travel, and to this we still incline, but of late years we have very largely developed our fiction side, and can claim some notable successes in the way of novels—and are always on the look-out for more! In addition, ever since the days of Sir William Smith we have strongly encouraged the educational side of the business, and at present are developing it still further. Poetry—sad confession for the publishers of Byron—alas, we cannot encourage—it has but small commercial value in these days, and more people seem to write it than to buy it.

“In a word, all we want is sound good selling works on our list and a much larger book-buying public. The average, per head of the population, bought in the course of the way is, we are told, a national disgrace. We agree!”

—COLONEL JOHN MURRAY.

**EVELEIGH NASH AND GRAYSON, LTD., 148, Strand,  
W.C.2.**

Although we publish several series containing works by well-known authors which have stood the test of time, we are also interested in books which are likely to appeal to any section of the reading public. With this object in view, the work of new authors will always receive our sympathetic consideration. As our output is limited, we are in a position to give individual attention to every book issued under our imprint.

Our publications are not confined to any one branch of literature, but we are particularly interested in fiction, biography, travel and translations.

**NISBET AND CO., LTD., 22, Berners Street, W.1.**

"For more than a century and a quarter we have been publishing books of merit on a continually widening basis. Our founder specialised in devotional literature; with the discovery of Ballantyne our place as 'juvenile' publishers was established. Since then there have been added books of standard worth in almost every department of literature—biography, travel, sport and fiction, and authoritative series in economics, criticism, and philosophical theology. All of these categories we are eager to augment.

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—B.C.

**THE NONESUCH PRESS, 16, Great James Street,  
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What we want is any book of real and rare talent which, by reason of the prejudices or habits of publishers and readers, has to-day a hard passage into print. If there are such things as books "too good for the public" we can do with them—poetry, stories, history—anything.

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 11, Warwick Square,  
E.C.4.**

All publishers, presumably, say that they want "good" books, and we cannot, in decency, do otherwise. Such orthodoxy, however, gives little help to the hopeful author who knows that his book is good and that all publishers seek excellence. So far as he is concerned, let us tabulate the details of our requirements as follows :

We publish :

Scholarly books on any subject.

Educational books.

Scientific books.

Medical books.

Technical books.

Children's books.

Music and books on music.

Devotional books and commentaries on the Bible.

"General" books, *i.e.*, *belles lettres*, diaries, memoirs,  
"lives."

We publish, in fact, any type of book *except novels*. The only fiction with which we meddle is the reprinted masterpiece, whether intended for such series as the World's Classics or for special re-issue in luxurious form like the Jane Austen edition supervised by Dr. R. W. Chapman, or Evelina

edited by Sir F. D. Mackinnon. Since, however, such reprints, demand editorial work and introductions from living writers we may claim that even the world of fiction is not entirely closed to us.

**CECIL PALMER, 49, Chandos Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2.**

My requirements are so obvious that they seem ridiculous when stated in cold print. All I want is someone who can write who has something to say about anything, for which there is even a remote chance of finding a public sufficiently large numerically to justify the initial cost of production. I am willing to read anything and everything.

**STANLEY PAUL AND CO. (1928), LTD., Paternoster House, E.C.4.**

Messrs. Stanley Paul are willing to consider manuscripts in all departments of literature (technical works excepted), and are glad to give them prompt and sympathetic consideration. Poetry and *belles lettres* take a minority place in their list, and they specialise in fiction, translations of foreign novels, and books of historical and biographical interest. They have also published works on art, music, the theatre, and travel, but authors are advised before sending manuscripts dealing with these subjects to write a letter to the publishers enclosing a short description of their work.

During the last twenty years Messrs Stanley Paul have introduced many new novelists to the reading public, and they are particularly enthusiastic about this sphere of their activities.

With regard to translations, this firm publish "The International Library." to which they add every year several volumes by foreign novelists. In most cases, novels included



in this series are published first in the usual library form. Translators are advised to submit a brief synopsis of the story and three or four chapters of their translation before completing the whole manuscript. Messrs. Stanley Paul will at all times be very pleased to consider readers' and writers' suggestions with reference to future volumes in this series.

They will also be pleased to keep clients posted with full details of their new publications from time to time upon receipt of their names and addresses.

**SIR ISAAC PITMAN AND SONS, LTD., Pitman House,  
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Our publications consist of commercial, educational (elementary and secondary), art, technical, general, and shorthand books. The shorthand side, which is highly specialised, offers hardly any opening for outside contributors. The commercial books cover a very wide range, including economics, accountancy, banking and finance, insurance, shipping, transport, business organisation, management and administration, advertising and salesmanship, foreign languages, etc. Those who can deal authoritatively with developments in this extensive field are invited to submit MSS. Teachers who keep themselves in close touch with new movements and tendencies in education, and can offer serious MSS., should get into touch with the educational department. On the technical side there is a demand for practical handbooks for craftsmen and artisans, for "specialist" books embodying original research, and for text-books for University and technical school students. There is a call in the general department for books of a semi-popular kind on common commodities and industries, and also for MSS. of a more literary character, relating to matters of general interest—historical, biographical, etc. Our art books include work in pastel, water-colour, pencil-drawing, landscape, flowers, etc.

**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, LTD., 24, Bedford Street,  
W.C.2.**

"Our standard to-day, while broad in its aspects, is the same as it was when the House was founded. We want to publish books, both fiction and of a general character, which will add something to literature. While the author of established reputation may be found in our lists, we are particularly interested in considering the work of young and new authors. We give their manuscripts the most careful and sympathetic examination. New ideas are always welcome, and we do not reject them, even though they may be entirely revolutionary. Publishing may not stay in a groove. Its influence on life and affairs is too important and vital to do that. We rule out nothing, providing it is sincere work. It is a duty, I suppose, to give time and thought to the most unpromising manuscript, for in it one may find a possible masterpiece, even though the manuscript is dog-eared and uninviting."

—MR. G. H. GRUBB.

**THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, 4, Bouverie  
Street, E.C.4.**

The Religious Tract Society, founded 1799, publishers of *Boy's Own Paper*, *Woman's Magazine*, *Sunday at Home*, *Great Thoughts*, *Every Girl's Paper*, *Little Dots*, *Light in the Home*, etc.

Issues religious and devotional books, Bibles and concordances ; adult fiction, books for boys and girls and children ; annuals and picture books.

Address : Henry R. Brabrook. General Manager,  
4, Bouverie Street, E.C.4.

**RIDER AND CO., 34, Paternoster Row, E.C.4.**

The type of literature in which the firm of Rider & Co. specialises may be covered by the general terms, "occult" and "mystical," and embraces such subjects as mysticism, of the religious or philosophical type; comparative religion; philosophy; psychology; alchemy; magic; occultism; theosophy; psychical research, etc.

While spiritualistic works figure somewhat prominently in their list, Rider's give preference to records of investigations carried out under strictly scientific test conditions. Inspirational script, with no other recommendation than the mere fact of its automatic origin, has become a drug on the market, and is not required.

Whatever the subject, it should be remembered that the special public to which Rider's books appeal is quick to appreciate independent thought and original research. Compilations of the "scissors and paste" variety are not encouraged.

While, speaking generally, first consideration is given to acknowledged authorities in their own special field, manuscripts are considered entirely on their merits, and not merely on the strength of the author's name.

**SANDS AND CO., 15, King Street, W.C.2.**

To the question asked one might reply, "Anything that will sell quickly—whether fiction, history, educational works, juvenile books—perhaps in the order named: but a Roman Catholic publisher has a restricted range and a limited market, and when he tries, as he naturally does, to appeal outside his own community, he encounters a certain amount of quite understandable suspicion, so that, while maintaining the high moral standard demanded by his Church, he will be fortunate, as far as fiction is concerned, if he can secure books which

are neither aggressive nor wearisome, and which, by their artistic merit, should appeal to the critical reader.

In history and science, if a Catholic author is to get a general hearing he must, without for a moment sacrificing his principles, never lose sight of the views and prejudices of the opposite side : he will then get his chance. I do not refer to theological treatises or liturgical works which are in a class by themselves.

There is certainly now a greater general interest taken in historical works by Catholic authors, if they deal with important personages, or landmarks in English history, than heretofore, and if they are written with a proper perspective.

Religious education is a very important feature in the Catholic Church, and books of instruction have to pass a severe test before they are adopted, but if they are in the front rank their sale can be very large indeed.

**MARTIN SECKER, 5, John Street, Adelphi, W.C.2.**

"The type of book I want is one which will have some interest enduring beyond the immediate season of its first appearance. Naturally, I will not object if a 'best-seller' comes my way ; but my primary aim in conducting a publishing business is to gather under my imprint a collection of books, all of which will have value (and therefore continue to sell modestly) for a period, let us say, of ten years from the date of publication.

*"Litera scripta manet."*

—MR. MARTIN SECKER.

**SEELEY SERVICE AND CO., LTD., 196, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.C.2.**

We are especially interested in (a) sports and games, (b) up-to-date travel and exploration (in little known parts of

the globe—countries, peoples and customs), (c) biography and reminiscences, (d) books on art (didactic and historical). (e) arts and crafts, and (f) collecting, and (g) popular science. both for the young and mature, is a feature to which we pay much attention. Lighter literature is issued in the form of (h) stories for boys and girls. We publish books dealing with (i) missionary lives and work, as well as those of (k) a religious character generally. Besides those mentioned many independent subjects of general interest are always being added to our list.

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Simpkin Marshall, Ltd., are best known as the largest wholesale distributors of books in the United Kingdom. They also publish standard series of books, as Simpkin's *Thin Paper Classics* and *Abbey Classics*.

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The best guide to the possible requirements of this well-known firm is their general catalogue, from which it will be seen that, although principally associated with certain standard lines, a very wide range is covered, and practically any work of general interest, either fact or fiction, stands a chance of acceptance. In works of an informative character the highest standard of accuracy is insisted upon. The firm's principal productions are *The Windsor Magazine*, *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Books*, the famous *Red Guides and Handbooks* to holiday resorts at home and abroad, the *Wonder Books* series for boys and girls, a host of useful books on subjects of everyday interest, gift and story books for children of all ages, and several important series of cheap copyright reprints. Good work of every kind and in any department—travel, science, biography, verse, juvenile or fiction—is carefully considered and a decision given as soon as possible.

**WILLIAMS AND NORGATE, LTD., 38, Great Ormond  
Street, W.C.1.**

Whether we are very nearly nonagenarians, as the date of our foundation shows, or only in our nonage as the purchase of the firm by its present owners early in 1928 indicates, I do not know, but I trust that we combine the wisdom and experience of the one state with the enterprise and dawning possibilities of the other. The present owners are, in fact, the firm of George Allen & Unwin Ltd., in consequence of which Mr. Stanley Unwin is our chairman and Mr. E. L. Skinner a director, while I myself am manager and also director. We have our historic list of books on theology, philosophy, science and history to maintain and extend. In this we have had to face the changes of the last few decades

and, for example, to break up and winnow "The Crown Theological Library" and certain other series. There was much theology which was valuable in its day, and much which was valuable for all time, and we have had to distinguish very carefully between them. Modern science, modern history, and modern philosophy have also to take the place of or to supplement the older schools. Our policy is to forgo the excursions into fiction and other alluring fields of literature which had been a feature of the later years of our predecessors and to revert to the more traditional, though newly-paved, paths of the House of the Lamp. What we do when we are feeling adventurous will be found under the heading of Noel Douglas.

#### H. F. AND G. WITHERBY, 326, High Holborn, W.C.1.

Our lists are open to practically all branches of literature with the exception of fiction and collections of verse. That is to say, we handle all forms of sport, travel, biography, county and family histories, economics, science in all its branches, especially fuels, metallurgy, geology, books on insurance, both marine and general, zoology and all forms of natural history not of a juvenile type.





# **HOW TO WRITE SERIAL FICTION**



## CHAPTER I

### THE SCOPE OF THE SERIAL

*Neglect of the serial market—How the young writer begins—Consideration of plays, novels, short stories, articles—The short story lure—Magazine fallacies—What about the serial?—Will it commercialise the writer's developing art?—Advantages of serial writing.*

OF all markets for the young author's work the serial is the most neglected. For years it has been the pariah of literary castes; the scorn of highbrows, dilettantes, and tyros alike. Yet much of this scorn has probably been unmerited, and the ambitious young writer can scarcely afford to reject a field of literary activity so profitable when intelligently exploited.

Mr. Arnold Bennett once said: "I can find no reason why the sensational serial should not be deemed a legitimate form of literary art, and I would advise the cultured aspirant not to pour out his scorn upon it."

What the serial may become, Mr. Bennett has himself brilliantly demonstrated upon many occasions, and, in doing so, has merely followed in the footsteps of great artists like Defoe, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Stevenson, and others.

There are few aspirants in fact who will not gain by

studying the serial fiction market, and, since this book is written for those interested, let us consider first of all what possibilities serial fiction offers in comparison with other branches of literary work.

The literary beginner looks around him and considers this world of ink he desires to conquer.

He thinks about writing a play, and usually concludes that the drama presents technical difficulties, demanding vast experience and great gifts. Perhaps our young author cannot write good dialogue, or cannot think in terms of dramatic situation, or possibly has merely heard the circulated tales of what happens to the MSS. of unknown dramatists !

The average young writer usually recognises his limitations and dismisses the sublime fancy of writing a play. Then he muses upon the novel.

Here, again, the idea of writing a story that will contain a minimum of 70,000 words is appalling. None but the most intrepid will consider a plan that will absorb most of his working time from two to twelve months ; that will mean writing at least 280 pages with 250 words to the page ; that will mean a sustained effort, beginning perhaps in sultry August and ending in chill December. And then, very possibly, ending in the most meagre of rewards, if indeed there is any reward forthcoming at all.

First novels are becoming increasingly more difficult to place. Nor do they necessarily become "best-sellers." There are many authors justly celebrated for their fine novels whose books have brought them only paltry sums. Financially, a first novel is an unpromising venture. The average successful first novel yields a gross return of

about £40. Many make barely enough to cover the author's typing expenses. The young author who makes more than £50 out of his first effort in book form is doing well. The discouraging truth is that there is no money in novels, except for the fortunate few. In the following chapter we deal in more detail with the potential proceeds of the novel.

In all probability the young writer abandons his thoughts of writing plays or novels, and sets out to bombard editors with articles and short stories.

Now this is where the young writer usually makes a mistake. True, it is comparatively easy to write an article, but for this very reason competition is extraordinarily keen. Unless one specialises, it is not easy to keep on finding subjects for articles, and space given to those on special subjects is necessarily limited.

You *may* make a living by writing articles on household management, or wireless, if you have specialist knowledge and an experience of such subjects; but if you have no highly specialised knowledge, it is practically impossible to make anything like a respectable income by article-writing.

Most of the articles which appear in magazines or newspapers are commissioned from writers who specialise in such work. There is relatively little space available for unsolicited articles, and, even when accepted, such work is not well paid.

When every other doctor, lawyer, actress, tennis-player, footballer, prize-fighter, society hostess, and débutante, their wives, husbands, children, and friends, are all being invited to write articles for the limited space of the "magazine page," the professional writer

who can turn his hand to fiction heeds the writing on the wall and relies as little as possible on free-lance journalism. Even in the wider fiction field many society women, lawyers, detectives, and such-like are busily engaged, but competition is less keen because the job is more difficult.

Influenced possibly by reflections of this kind, more probably by hard experience, most literary aspirants turn definitely to fiction, and begin by the writing of short stories.

They take this course under the impression that it is easier to write short fiction than long fiction, and easier to write a story of 6,000 words than one of 60,000. On the whole, the average young fiction writer thinks he has a better chance of wresting a living from editors by selling them short stories than by trying to sell them anything else.

In imagining this, the average young writer is wrong. A good short story is one of the most difficult things to write, and a bad one—whatever the cynics may say—will not always sell.

One of the most difficult things to free-lance on successfully is the short story. Even among experienced short-story writers, there are very few men in England accomplishing the feat; most of them, even the best known short-story writers, do other work, and the larger part of their income probably comes from this other work.

If an experienced short-story writer can get a dozen good plots in a year, he is lucky. Ideas for good stories are few and far between, and though short stories can be "manufactured," they show signs of the process quicker than anything else.

It takes an experienced craftsman to manufacture a short story ; it often takes a " big name " to sell it when it is manufactured, and then the discerning editor only takes it because this man or woman has given the magazine excellent work before, and he doesn't like to reject the artificial stuff lest the real goods are taken elsewhere in the future.

The young writer who thinks it will be easy to get a living from the writing of short stories is merely ignorant. In this country the prices paid for short stories by a writer without a " name " are very poor. The first stories he sells will fetch only two or three guineas per thousand—five guineas is extraordinary fortune—and they are unlikely to sell in America, where short-story writing really pays, because they will not be adapted to that market.

When an intelligent young writer with a fair amount of talent sends a short story to a magazine, it will sometimes bring from an editor a letter that goes something like this :

*Dear Sir,*

*I have read your story, " The Making of a Man," with much interest, but though it is a clever story, well-constructed, and well-worked out, it does not seem to us the kind of yarn that the magazine-reading public will appreciate.*

*If you were to study our magazine you would probably form a fair idea of the kind of story we require.*

*Yours faithfully.*

Letters of this kind are not at all infrequent, and often cause an amount of heartburn that would astonish the well-meaning editor.

The intelligent young writer has studied the editor's magazine, but he studies it again, and, failing to see why his story is rejected, concludes that it must be bad. In reality, the sort of story that attracts this kind of editorial letter is not bad, but good. It only fails because it is not a typical English magazine product, and, though the work and its author interest the editor, he will not publish the story by an unknown man. A "big name" would sell it; no "name" at all won't.

The young writer should not study the magazines with a view to literary standards, but to find out what is the *characteristic type*. If he can write at all well he will find published stories much worse than his own, but they are written along different lines. Publication standard is not by any means a high *literary* standard.

When he studies the magazines, the young writer must discount the "names" entirely. Stories over well-known signatures may be good or bad, and may deal with any subject, in any way; they are there because of the "names."

In order to appreciate how difficult it is going to be to make an income by the writing of short stories, the amateur would do better to examine a magazine in a different manner altogether.

Let him open a magazine, or several magazines, and see the names that appear in the index. He will find that month after month the same names appear. Some of them are famous, some comparatively unknown, but each magazine has its own set of authors. The magazines are made up with half a dozen to a dozen short stories, and every month the quota is filled with practically the same half-dozen or dozen names. Now and then a new man



breaks in, and, when he does, his story is very probably the best of the lot. But not easily does the new man become one of the elect ; the way is rough, and hard, and jealously guarded.

Editors want new writers, but if their work is to satisfy editorial requirements they must not only be as good as the regular contributors—they must knock the “regulars” into a cocked hat, and keep on doing it until they have gained their footing. That is the way in which “names” are made.

All of which analysis goes to show this : to earn a living by the writing of plays and novels is intensely difficult, as the free-lance usually sees for himself. To make a decent income from articles and short stories is almost equally difficult, and it is only the young writer's optimistic ignorance that makes him think differently.

Is there, then, some easier way that the young writer has not thought of ? Is there a means to a decent livelihood, earned by the pen, and earned by easier methods, and in paths less choked by competition ?

There is. The average young writer has completely forgotten the serial.

It is astonishing that the serial fiction market, and its money-making possibilities, are so completely overlooked by the average free-lance.

The thing is odd because serial writing provides better prospects for the unknown young writer than any other form of his work. It undoubtedly offers him the easiest path to earning a decent income by his pen, and to an unknown author, without money or influence, this is often a primary consideration.

The demand for serials is great ; payment is good in comparison with other forms of work ; the tyranny of "big names" operates less in this field than in any other, and the money earnings of a serial are likely to be substantial.

At this point, let us try to answer a possible objection.

"This is all very well," says a young writer. "It may be true that it is easier to make money by serial writing than by other forms of the author's craft. The field may be more open to new and unknown men, and the work may provide decent incomes for less effort. But what about fame ? What about making a big reputation by one's work ? I, for one, have not adopted literature as a profession merely in order to make money. I want to write good fiction for its own sake. Of course, I want to make a certain amount of money, but I am far from wishing to become a mere money-making machine. I do not estimate my work in terms of the cash-register, but in decent honest achievement. I will make money by doing my own work as well as I can, in my own way, or I shall fail in the attempt."

This, or something like it, is what a young author may think, and since the objection is fundamental and one of first principles, it should be met before we go any further.

First let us say that we have every sympathy with the sentiments expressed by our imaginary young author.

Henry Ford has wisely said that "a business that has only made money has failed." This is true because humanity is greater than money, and real achievement is above "success." And, if the business that only succeeds in making money has failed in the widest sense, the

artist who only makes money has doubly failed, for the artist deals in "human stuff," deeper and more spiritual than business commodities.

Without cant or hypocrisy, a young artist owes it to himself to develop the best that is in him, and the deterioration of an artist is a tragedy.

This being our belief, we have to consider whether a young writer is likely to deteriorate by turning to serial fiction, instead, say, of writing novels or short stories.

We fail to see why he should deteriorate. There are, of course, a few writers who have it in them to develop some peculiar form of work, of high quality, and entirely unsuited to serialisation. They will mature in their own way, without consideration of any market for their work. They will produce the best that is in them. Their work may or may not be suitable for the serial market. It does not follow that it will *not* be. Tchekov's stories were first published in newspapers. *The Pickwick Papers* came out in instalments. Dostoyevsky wrote serials. Modern authors like Liam O'Flaherty and R. H. Mottram have been serialised. But these are exceptions which only test the rule. Under present conditions, fiction in order to serialise must approximate closely to the requirements which we shall presently indicate.

The majority of young fiction writers will have nothing to fear, and nothing to lose, by studying the serial, and by attempting to write it. Such men as Defoe, Balzac, and Flaubert have written serials, and many famous modern novelists have adapted themselves to serial requirements, apparently without harm to their work.

As a matter of fact, what the young writer wants to

do, in order to develop, is simply to write. It may sound paradoxical, but one can only learn to write by writing.

The man who writes a thousand words a day, and wants to know the reason why if the thousand words are not forthcoming, has a greater claim to being considered a professional writer than the *soi-disant* "artist" who waits constantly for inspiration.

Human laziness is a subtle thing. It evolves for us many ingenious excuses why we should not work. To the amateur and beginner the "lack of inspiration" is the most successful of these excuses—successful because it is often *almost* sincere. The professional writer knows all about that "inspiration" failing; he knows that it is merely sloth.

It is easier to stand at the edge of a pool of icy water than to plunge in. It is easier to plunge into icy water than to sit down to a hard job of writing. But with every successful effort one makes against the disinclination to write, the affair becomes easier. Form the habit of writing, and it's wonderful how "inspiration" comes.

One of the advantages of serial writing is that it will train a young writer by the simple process of making him write. A novel can be put on one side indefinitely, but a serial story, the first instalments of which are in the press, must be continued or the editor will have something to say.

Serial writing means practised writing; it usually means a facile pen, though there are many notable exceptions to this rule. Whether the young writer produces his serial fiction quickly or slowly, there is no reason why his style should become slovenly, or why he should write

his serial with less care than he would give to the composition of a novel.

Since every serial story has potential book rights attached to it, the young author would be stupid to write his stuff carelessly ; stupid, because he is neglecting his style in the formative period of his life ; stupid because he may be losing a hundred pounds or more through his failure to sell the serial as a book, and stupid because he will be antagonising the fiction editor who is handling the serial copy, and who will possibly cut the careless author out as a future contributor.

For the vast majority of young writers the serial will only serve to develop their best talents. It will do no harm to any conscientious craftsman. The work will overcome a reluctance to produce a large number of words—a reluctance and fear that nearly always embarrass the amateur.

Most beginners start by writing short stuff. Even when they have a good strong plot they treat it slightly and in brief space. A length of 5,000 words scares them, and 50,000 words appear simply appalling.

To the experienced writer, novel-length fiction may be arduous, but it is not disconcerting to contemplate. A thousand words are as nothing in his sight.

The writing and practice of serial fiction will soon turn the amateur writer into a professional, at least in his outlook upon production of words. And this outlook is important.

So we must submit that the writing of serials will not injure the young writer's style or development.

There are, of course, artificialities in the construction of the serial, but so there are in verse-construction. To the amateur and the incompetent, such arbitrary forms of construction are difficult and tedious ; to the competent writer they become a definite help.

As we shall see later, most of the artificialities of form in a serial lie in the construction of the first instalment ; after that the story is fairly plain sailing. It is true that a "curtain" must be reached at the end of each instalment, but this only means a lifting of the interest at the end of each chapter or instalment, and the writer who cannot work a simple trick like that had better abandon all sensational and popular fiction.

In point of fact, most present-day novelists lift the interest at the end of a chapter much as serial writers do. The device of "suspense" is one of the most valuable technical assets. The writer who cannot or does not care to use this may be an excellent craftsman, but his work lies outside the sphere of popular fiction.

The serial writer must work from point to point in his story, and see to it that he reaches something fairly dramatic, say, at the end of every 2,000 words. So far from being very difficult, this planning of a work, and splitting it into instalments, will greatly assist the fiction writer. In time, he may find it hard to work in any other way.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BEGINNER AND THE SERIAL

*Commercial prospects of serial writing compared with free-lance journalism, novels, short stories, plays, films, etc.—Editorial jobs—Why "big names" are at a discount in the serial field—Present tendency to feature big names only ephemeral—More advantages to the beginner—The value of publicity.*

THESE are the reasons why young authors have a better chance of getting a good living from the writing of serials than from journalism, short stories, or novels. The market for serials is more open ; it gives good publicity, and good pay.

Free-lance journalism is notoriously precarious. A prodigious amount of effort may yield little or no return. Competition is keen, and likely to become keener. Remuneration is slight. The free-lance who consistently earns more than a hundred pounds a year is entitled to regard himself as successful. It is doubtful whether there are more than a dozen free-lances in English journalism earning a four-figure income from "outside contributions." Most successful practitioners combine their journalistic output with fiction, editorial jobs, and other activities.

Short stories, as we have already indicated, are neither easy to write nor to sell. The young writer who can place a dozen stories a year may congratulate himself. If

three guineas a thousand words is taken as an average rate for an unknown, or relatively unknown, author (and this is a generous estimate), it is easy to see that real money is hard to earn. And unless extraordinary fortune comes one's way, short-story writing will not yield a substantially higher return.

The financial return from the novel is the subject of so much misconception, that a more detailed survey of the writer's prospects may prove illuminating.

It is relatively easier, in our opinion, to place a novel than a short story or article. Probably this is due partly to the difficulty of pronouncing judgment on a novel as compared with short stories or journalistic contributions. The magazine or newspaper editor is rarely doubtful about the manuscripts he rejects; but the publisher is very often in the dark about the quality or appeal of the novel manuscripts that pass through his hands. It is a commonplace of publishing experience to receive reports on manuscripts which are, to say the least, conflicting in their views. Moreover, so many manuscripts which the publisher rejects achieve success when brought out later by rival firms that it is not surprising he is occasionally tempted to take a chance with a doubtful piece of work.

Nor has the embryo novelist so much competition to contend with from practised short-story writers and journalists as he might reasonably anticipate. The reason for this is rather curious. Anyone who has earned money by writing short stories or articles seems to get into the habit of assessing the value of his work at so much per thousand words. It is indeed not difficult to understand the reluctance of the man who can sell his stories regularly



to embark on the prolonged labour of a novel with no certainty that he will ever get a penny for his pains. Writing "on spec" is something that does not recommend itself, as a rule, to the writer who can be reasonably sure of his earning capacity in certain defined directions.

And so the ranks of the aspiring novelist contain only a fair proportion of those who have already won their spurs in the short-story and journalistic fields. There are, of course, a good many amateurs who are merely bitten with the writing bug and nothing else, and their effusions are familiar enough to publishers' readers; for them the only cure is time, which, if all else fails, will surely kill them off. These people are the literary equivalent of the stage-struck girls who are the bane of theatrical managers' lives. Lest any reader be harbouring an uneasy suspicion that he may himself belong to this pestiferous category, we would like to assure him that the chief symptom is a determined reluctance to take or consider advice. We have known cases where charitably minded publishers' readers have tried to tell cranks of this order that they are only wasting their time, the result being almost invariably an abusive letter expressing the writer's conviction that he (or she) is the victim of a wicked conspiracy to prevent his (or her) works of genius being published.

Although we would not be so rash as to assert that there are not enough novelists, it is fair to emphasise the demand that undoubtedly exists at the present time for novels, and the rewards which await the successful author. On all sides publishers are clamouring for good new novels. There is more scope for new writers now than ever before.

The financial return varies considerably. In the case of a first novel, under present conditions, the author has no right to be disappointed if his first book earns him less than £50. Many first novels advertised as successful and favourably reviewed fail to earn in royalties more than half that sum. Taking 10 per cent as the commencing royalty and 7s. 6d. as the published price, it will be seen that to earn £50 in royalties something over 1,300 copies have to be sold. Many first novels sell under a thousand copies. A fact of which most writers are unaware is that publishers lose money on the majority of the first novels they publish.

Why, then, it may be asked, do they publish them? For this reason: in anticipation of more mature and successful work from the same pen, publishers will cheerfully run the risk of actual loss on a first book. That is one reason why the usual contract for a first novel covers an option on the next two or three books. In our view, the present system is more than fair to the author, for he begins to earn money from the very first copy sold, whereas the publisher cannot show any profit at all until a certain number of copies has been sold.

Now this estimate of £50, which we consider generous for the average first novel, deters many potential novelists from undertaking a novel. In the estimation of the writer who can get his three or four guineas a thousand for short stories and articles, a return of £50 for a hundred thousand words or so is pretty poor pay. And so, as we have already indicated, they turn down the prospect of writing a novel, overlooking the beneficial reaction of the publication of a "successful" novel on the writer's other markets. Such an attitude is shortsighted.

It must be borne in mind that there is always the possibility that the novel will exceed everyone's anticipations—in which case no limit can reasonably be set to the money it may earn for its author. Take, for example, Sylvia Thomson's *Hounds of Spring*. This novel was a considerable success both in America and England; and we understand the film rights were disposed of in America for a very large sum. Up to now this book has earned for its clever and fortunate young author many thousands of pounds, and is still probably earning good royalties. Moreover, the success of this novel has definitely established the author's literary position.

It is no exaggeration to say that the novelist who scores a big hit can make more money in a few months than the persevering and averagely successful magazine and newspaper contributor can make in a lifetime. For this reason alone, there is ample commercial justification for trying one's hand at a novel, provided always that one has confidence in one's own ability.

Now let us consider the financial prospects of the serial. The average payment for a serial in England is, to an unknown author, precisely the same rate as he would get for a short story, namely, two to three guineas per thousand words.

So it will be seen that a young writer who can manage to sell only two serials a year can provide himself with a respectable income. The length of the average newspaper serial is 60,000 words, so that two of these stories would provide our young author—at the minimum rate that he should accept—with £240.

He ought to be able to write more than just two serials a year, but, if he doesn't sell any more than will

bring him £240 per annum he can live, or, if he isn't prepared to, he had better take up some other occupation than that of writing!

It must be remembered that in reckoning our young serial writer's earnings at £240, we are giving him the value only of what are termed first British serial rights. These are the only rights he should part with for his two guineas per thousand words, and, if his serial is a good one, it will undoubtedly have other saleable rights attaching to it.

The British Empire volume rights—which limitation most English publishers are prepared to accept in their contracts—can be negotiated, and the book may be published at 7s. 6d., or 3s. 6d., and afterwards in cheaper editions. There are the second British serial rights, foreign serial rights, colonial serial rights, and film rights. If the story makes a successful book, the film rights are potentially valuable, and, if the author is lucky enough to sell film rights, a substantial sum should be forthcoming from this source. It is difficult to estimate, since everything depends upon the story and the buying company, but the author may reasonably expect anything between £200 and £500.

A good sensational serial may be very successful in book form at 3s. 6d. or 2s. 6d., or even 7s. 6d., and such fiction is often accepted for screen production.

One hears, in fact, of serial stories being sold in one way or another twenty times over. Some of these rights are only worth five or ten pounds, but consider how they must help to swell the original earnings for first British serial rights!

A serial story may be sold as a novel, and the terms

offered by the publishers to the serial writer are unimpaired by the fact that the story has been published already in serial form. The book publisher rather welcomes the publicity given to the story by serial publication, but, on the other hand, a writer who produces a novel may find it practically impossible to sell the serial rights of his story. Many editors are unwilling to publish a story which can be obtained complete between covers at any time during its serialisation. This does not apply to "best-sellers," however, which are frequently serialised after book publication. There is an increasing tendency to buy second serial rights of outstandingly successful books.

Thus a serial story is always potentially a novel, but a novel is seldom a possible serial. A good novel may not, and very often indeed does not, lend itself to serialisation, but a good serial will usually, although not always, make a good book.

The better a novel sells, the more valuable will be its second serial rights. On the other hand, many editors avoid buying second serial rights. The book will be in all the libraries ; will be reproduced in cheap book form, and consequently will be so accessible that to run it as a serial would be inviting readers' criticism. But a successful serial arouses interest in the story, so that if it appears in book form many who read it in instalments will buy the book to have it on their shelves, or get it out of the library, to absorb the story completely.

The average serial writer thus has a financial advantage over the average novelist. He has also a similar kind of advantage over the average short-story writer.

It would be difficult for a young writer to make £240 in one year by the sale of 120,000 words of short stories.

If we suppose his short stories to average 4,000 words, he would have to produce and sell thirty short stories in a year—a herculean task.

A beginner who could produce good saleable ideas for twenty short stories in a year would be a prodigy. And, suppose he did this, and sold his stuff at an average of three guineas a thousand, he would still be worse off than our serial writer.

The short-story writer, producing the ordinary magazine story, has no chance of book rights. Volumes of collected magazine short stories are out of favour, except of course those by established novelists, and it is practically impossible for an unknown writer to find a publisher.

American rights may be ruled out in a similar way. We did not count possible American rights for our young serial writer, and we cannot reasonably count them for the short-story writer.

The writer of short stories has a much harder task to make a decent living than the serial writer. To write short stories is admittedly more difficult, but is not better paid, as a rule. The magazine contributor has to do an enormous amount of speculative work. He cannot obtain a commission for a short story by presenting merely a synopsis; editors will insist on seeing the entire story, and, if they don't like it, the author's work goes for nothing.

For this reason, short-story writing is one of the most difficult and heart-breaking jobs in the whole writing game. It is a long series of constantly rejected manuscripts. This truth may sound pessimistic, but it is better that the young author should face truth than false optimism.

At the same time the literary aspirant might as well tread the easier path, and serial writing will probably prove the easier path to him.

In order to sell a serial he has only to write some five or six thousand words and a synopsis, for usually a serial editor will commission a serial after approving a first instalment and synopsis. The first instalment of the average newspaper serial runs to five or six thousand words, which is about the length of the average magazine short story.

A free-lance writer with an idea for a serial has only to write five or six thousand words, and a brief synopsis, to produce a commission of over a hundred pounds' worth of work. The editor will accept the serial on what he has seen, safeguarding himself by a clause in the commissioning letter to the effect that the serial must be written to his satisfaction.

The young author may have to rewrite portions of his story, under the very instructive guidance of the editor, but that sort of thing will be far from doing the aspirant any harm.

It will be seen that a serial writer who has successfully written a five thousand word first instalment will be comparatively free from financial worry for some time to come. A successful short story of 5,000 words would leave its author with ten or fifteen guineas, and the necessity to produce another idea, and story, when that small amount of money was gone.

The serial writer has sold 5,000 words at two to three guineas per thousand, and is merely under the necessity of carrying on with his story. It is easier to carry on a story than to create an entirely fresh one, with a new plot,

and new characters. It is, somehow, easier to write a *commissioned* story than a speculative story, especially for a young writer. Also, though it may be as easy to get plots for three short stories as one serial, it is certainly not so easy to get ideas for a dozen short stories. Altogether, the writer of serials has the easier task, and is better paid for lighter work.

The primary desire of every young author possessing neither money nor influence is to support himself by his pen. He may try to get a job on a newspaper or magazine, and this, if he can obtain it, will give him useful experience. But, if he is really going to be an author, if he is truly "an organism capable of being a good writer," such jobs will not content him for long. In a short time he will have absorbed all the knowledge that he can usefully gain from such occupation.

He will no longer want to be sub-editor, or even editor. He will find that his job is too arduous, in a modern newspaper office, to allow him to write fiction in his spare time. Either he must abandon his job or his writing, and if he is a writer with the real stuff in him, it will be the job that is thrown up.

He will want to give all his time and freshest hours to the development of his craft, and to do this he must be free, and capable of making a decent income by his pen. And this is where the writing of serials seems emphatically the easiest way.

We have claimed that the serial market is more open to the young and unknown author. It is a fact that serials are constantly bought and published in the principal newspapers over the signatures of men who are entirely unknown to the public. The regular serial-reading public



don't care two hoots about "big names"—they just want a good story. As serial editors are aware of this fact, the serial market is much more open to new talent than any other.

*En passant*, we must refer to the present tendency to run novelists with "big names" as serial writers in newspapers. At the same time unknown men are not being excluded. In fact, "small men" probably predominate all the time. For various reasons, the fashion of printing big novelists' work in newspaper instalments is likely to be only a passing phase. It is doubtful whether the policy can ever be successful, and it is too expensive to be maintained constantly, not because of the bigger prices paid to the authors, but because of the expensive advertising campaigns—costing anything from five to twenty times the author's fee—which invariably launch the new feature.

The serial-reading public is not the novel-reading public. Novel readers like to read a whole story at a sitting or two; they will not take their fiction in homeopathic doses as the regular serial reader delights to do. Most novel readers will not read even their favourite authors in small instalments, but will wait until the story appears in book form, when they can absorb it at their leisure and convenience.

The newspapers can gain little by running big novelists' work in small patches. First, because very frequently the big novelist's work does not lend itself to that kind of presentation; big novelists want a larger canvas, and though the magazines can print long instalments, newspapers can't.

Secondly, a "big name" means very little to the vast

serial-reading public, and the money expended on buying the name is wasted. It is doubtful whether the majority of regular serial readers notice a name at all, but a good serial written by an experienced serial writer will put up the circulation of a periodical, and keep it up.

What, then, has prompted this experimental policy? When a newspaper prints a serial by a well-known novelist its proprietors are appealing to a new public. They will possibly gain as readers many of the well-known novelist's public, and they will lose, probably, some of their regular serial readers, who are not interested in the work of fashionable novelists. They will not gain more than a fraction of the famous novelist's public, because that public undoubtedly prefers book to serial form. Consequently, the newspapers now pursuing the policy of buying "big names"—names, that is, not especially noted for serial fiction—are paying a lot of money for a doubtful advantage.

They must spend at least five times as much for their serial, and back it by expensive publicity. Even if they gain in circulation, they are unlikely to increase their advertising revenue. Advertisers know that as soon as the famous man's serial stops the new circulation figures must drop, because a large number of this author's readers will desert. "Big names" may cause an artificial rise in circulation, but the editor who can buy constantly a good standard of the regular serial fiction by men who specialise in serial requirements, and buy it at ordinary serial rates, will maintain his circulation all the year round, and will increase that circulation substantially every time he buys a particularly good serial.

It is a fact that a story by a famous novelist, run as

a serial, may kill a journal stone dead. It is said that the editor of a certain fiction magazine now defunct attributes its demise to the serial publication of a novel by Joseph Conrad ! The work of the regular serial writer, on the other hand, being adapted to its market, can never do much harm even if unsuccessful.

It is doubtful whether the big novelist can beat the experienced serial writer at the latter's own game. In all probability the competent writer of feuilletons has nothing to fear from the competition of his brother novelist, who seems for the moment to be attacking the serial writer's means of livelihood.

So far as the newspapers are concerned, there will always be a big demand for good serials written by anyone who can write the kind of stuff the regular serial readers demand. The taste of the average serial reader is not likely to change very much until revolutions are effected in the "make-up" of newspapers. If, for example, the big daily newspapers gave large four-leaf fiction supplements instead of the single "magazine page"—but that is looking ahead. Meanwhile the serial market is still the one most open to unknown authors.

We now come to our third point—good publicity. This is well worth the young writer's consideration. Nowadays advertisement brings its own reward ; publicity has a definite money value. A serial by an unknown writer will be boomed by a powerful newspaper, and by any other journals that may be allied with the one actually printing the story.

A young author who sells a serial to a powerful "daily" will not only have his name printed in that paper in large type every day for some weeks, but will have his stuff

advertised possibly in a powerful evening paper and various other weeklies run by the same firm of publishers.

If the beginner's serial appears in a Sunday paper, it will give him publicity for a period of two and a half months at least. His name will appear prominently in large type in these powerful papers, and for the time he will get from such papers a publicity only given to "best-sellers" and successful dramatists.

Serial writing gives publicity to the unknown author in far greater measure than the short story, which will merely lie among others in a magazine to be seen, or overlooked, according to chance. It will take the writing, and selling, of many stories before the author has his name printed among the elect, upon the outside cover, but the first instalment of his first published serial will be displayed to all the thousands who buy the particular newspaper in which it appears. There will be little chance of readers missing it.

## CHAPTER III

### FICTION EDITORS AND DOGMA

*Avoiding rejection slips—The basic appeal of popular fiction—Verisimilitude and the foreign setting—Costume stories—Critical taste of public greatly improved—Fantasies—Originality not required by editors—The truth about editors—Observing the conventions—A doctrine of acceptance*

THE rejection slip is mightier than the pen. While it is true that the literary aspirant writes for the public, it is also true that he must please editors before he has an opportunity to reach the public. The editor stands *in medias res*, and it is his requirements that the young author should study most carefully. It sometimes happens that editorial conventions are not representative of public likes and dislikes. But the amateur who tries to convince an editor that his policy is wrong is swiftly qualifying for unpopularity in that particular quarter. Much wiser not to butt one's head up against the brick wall of editorial dogma. Failure to observe editorial requirements will result in a deluge of "regrets" until the despairing scribe will come to loathe the sight of a perfectly decent postman.

There is a fashion in popular fiction, as in most forms of public entertainment, and editors and publishers are

guided by the dictates of fashion. Not since the 'nineties, for example, has the short story really been fashionable. The vogue for volumes of short stories may return at any time, but at present publishers are not hankering after books of short stories except by a small minority of authors who have gained or are assured of a public for such work.

Similarly the fiction editor is guided by his experience of what the public have been buying in the last few years. "What the public wants" is a problem that no one can ever solve satisfactorily, for the simple reason that the public does not know itself what it wants. There are, however, certain current fashions which serve as indicators. The danger is that such indications, too rigidly observed by the buyer of fiction, may easily lead to editorial dogma. Only too often the story that editors rejected has become the corner-stone of some periodical run by a man with more elasticity of viewpoint.

In the last ten years or so there have existed several broad editorial theories as to the type of story that the public liked or disliked.

There is, for example, what may be called the "local interest" theory. This is expressed in the dictum that "for a London reading public one story set in London was worth ten set in France, twenty set in Spain, and a hundred set in Amazonas."

According to this theory, the interest of the reader is held proportionately as the story was set near to his home town, and the thrill diminished in ratio to a kind of law of inverse squares, the vanishing-point being somewhere at the other side of the world.

Nowadays this dogma has received a punishing

blow, if not an absolute knock-out. The cinema, which may be taken as a general indicator of popular taste, ransacks the whole world to give its patrons a thrill. Stories are set almost anywhere, and a good story is popular irrespective of topography. The hero or heroine may dwell in London, New York, the Middle West, or the South Sea Islands. The prejudice against a foreign setting is dying rapidly, if it is not actually dead.

As a matter of fact there was a very definite reason for the old taboo on foreign setting in popular fiction. Such a setting went a long way to destroy the plausibility and verisimilitude of a story to readers who knew nothing of the strange lands that formed the author's background.

It is a common editorial dictum that readers get most of their enjoyment from a story through their subconscious association of themselves with the characters in the story.

The typist, reading the thrilling adventures of a typist heroine, asks herself—often subconsciously: "Could this possibly happen to me?" If the reader decides that such adventures could never conceivably happen to her, her interest in the story relaxes at once. Plausibility can be strained in popular fiction, but not overstrained.

This sounds fairly easy, but it is not so easy as it sounds. It is difficult to know where to draw the line between what the reader will reject and what he or she will love to swallow. Many a fine popular story has been turned down by an editor who was too much of a stickler for verisimilitude.

The appeal of popular fiction is largely based on the dream phantasy of the average reader. Frustrated desires and inhibitions run rife in these modern days, and their

victims find solace in "day-dreams," the "pictures," serials, and sensational novels.

Looking at a picture, a critic said to an artist, "I never saw a sunset like that in my life!"

"No," replied the artist. "But don't you wish you could?"

Romance and vicarious excitement are what the average reader wants; he has enough of what is drab, prosaic, and everyday. People like even their sunsets to be a little embellished. Their imaginations are eager to go rather more than half-way to meet the audacious writer.

The pallid, underpaid, underfed city clerk does not want to read about cheap boarding-houses, suburban back gardens, and dingy offices. In his dreams he is wild, untamed, primitive man, and with Jack London sails strange seas, or with Tarzan fights lions single-handed. In his dreams he is no longer mediocre or inept, he has a vast and piercing intellect, and lying upon a Baker Street sofa works out subtle problems that have baffled the most astute detectives in three countries. In his dreams the London clerk becomes Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Cyrano, and Douglas Fairbanks. He is outlaw, soldier, duellist, and poet; he fights gallantly and heroically, and, as gallantly, he walks by the side of some magnificent and lovely lady; ardently he looks down into her eyes, and she looks up at him, and smiles. . . .

What is true to life, and what is not? Can one be a romanticist, and at the same time a realist? To what degree should a desire for verisimilitude guide either author or editor in considering a popular story? Probably the answer lies every time in the treatment of the theme.



No two people will necessarily agree as to what is true or what is untrue ; what is beautiful or what is stupid and ugly.

Meanwhile the mythical typist asks herself unconsciously : " Could this ever happen to me ? " And, if she decides that it could not, possibly she lays the story aside. Or maybe she continues her reading with a little sigh of satisfaction, and says : " It couldn't ever happen, but wouldn't it be lovely if it did ! "

The young author will do well to consider this question of verisimilitude before starting to write fiction. If he has never in his life travelled beyond Ostend, it may be as well not to set the action of his story in Tristan da Cunha. True, he may be able to sell such a story, but the odds are against him. The editor, if he does not reject the story at once, will certainly regard it more critically and with more misgivings than if the setting were English.

There are, of course, people who can write vividly and enthrallingly of places they have never visited. Flaubert revived in marvellous fashion the splendours and miseries of ancient Carthage. But Flaubert read 15,000 volumes to aid his purpose, and his was exceptional talent. We are not shouldering the task of writing advice for genius, we are merely considering the needs of the average young writer.

There is, then, no reason, *a priori*, why a story should not be set anywhere on earth or in the waters under the earth. The task of picturing a strange and exotic environment will be difficult, however, and, despite

the educational work of the cinema, there still exists some editorial prejudice against outlandish and bizarre surroundings.

The Great War acted as a gigantic Thomas Cook to millions of people. It made many Englishmen familiar with remote spots that in happier times they would never have visited. If the young writer, therefore, is burning to describe the life of Punta Arenas or Vladivostok, he had better have a cut at the job. It will, however, probably be easier to sell a serial story that is set in Ealing or Mayfair.

Another editorial prejudice which certainly exists to-day is that against historical or "sword and cloak" fiction. For some years this type of story has been out of favour, and again the dislike of it is probably based on its lack of reality and verisimilitude.

Some fifteen or twenty years ago there was a flood of historical romance, and while some of it was excellent, a great deal more was artificial, stilted, and wholly meretricious.

The trouble is that bad "sword and cloak" fiction is so easy. Plots are almost ready-made. The hero, for example, leaves home to join the Monmouth rebellion, has such adventures as were possible in those times, escapes from Sedgemoor, rescues the heroine from Judge Jeffreys, and sets out for Holland and safety with his bride. A few rounded oaths, rapiers, and ruffles, slender fingers tapping a snuff-box, hard riding, Somerset yokels, Puritans and cavaliers, bright eyes, panniered skirts, and the thing is done.

The thing, in consequence, was overdone. There was a deluge of bad "historical" novels, full of anachronisms that could not be forgiven, and insincerity that was unpardonable. Probably it will be some time before fiction editors open their columns again to "sword and cloak" serials.

It is a pity, because this kind of story, if honestly and competently done, is very fascinating. Its interest, too, is perennial. Its undiminished popularity is shown by the successes in book form of modern writers like Jeffrey Farnol, H. C. Bailey, Rafael Sabatini, George Preedy, and Marjorie Bowen.

Mr. Sabatini's work has been recently produced with great success upon stage and screen, and has delighted hundreds of thousands of people. Douglas Fairbanks has produced popular successes on the "sword and cloak" lines, and filled the cinema theatres. In the big magazines, where well-known novelists' work is published serially, and in long instalments, historical novels are often reproduced. The newspaper serial editor, however, looks askance at costume stories, and it is very seldom indeed that he publishes one.

In recent years some papers, notably the *Sunday Chronicle*, have published "historical" serials by regular serial writers like John Hunter and John Chancellor. These stories were entirely successful, and it may be that costume stories are due for a return to popular favour shortly. If so, they will probably have to be more sincere and more technically perfect than were the average "historical" stories of twenty years ago.

In a survey of modern popular fiction, one thing leaps to the eye immediately. It is manifest that the

public taste has grown more critical in the last twenty years. Stories may not be better in original conception or in literary style as style is ordinarily understood, but they are vastly improved in technique.

It is demanded of the present-day story-teller that he keeps more closely to real human existence; that his characters behave more like real human beings, and that his story moves in a more lively and more interesting fashion than was the case twenty years ago.

The public to-day will have any kind of story except the *genre ennuyeux*. They demand deft, competent story-telling, and they refuse to be bored.

If anyone doubts that in mere technique the average professional writer of to-day is ahead of his confrère of twenty years ago, let that doubter pick up an old-fashioned novel and note its dialogue, its moralising interruptions and circumlocutions. Better still, let him witness the revival of an average twenty-year-old play, and listen to the soliloquising, the clumsy introduction of necessary information; watch the casual entries and exits, and groan at the elephantine humour. It is only really a great play that will stand revival when it was written twenty years ago, and yet the technique of the lesser plays was good enough for its day.

If "sword and cloak" fiction is to return to full popularity, therefore, it must be technically more alert and more vital than it was.

Meanwhile, if the young author's knowledge of history and archæology is slight, he will do well to pause before writing a story of cinque-cento Italy, or even tackling the Monmouth rebellion. Even if his knowledge for such work is adequate, he would do well to remember

that the fashion in serials is at present against him, and other work will stand a better chance of a sale.

Another class of fiction which is distinctly out of fashion with the gentlemen who edit newspaper serials is the fantasy story—the serial based on supernatural ideas. And this editorial prejudice is more difficult to understand than that against the costume story.

As a matter of fact fantasy is perennially popular. The sale of novels by Jules Verne, of stories like *Vice Versa* and *The Brass Bottle*; the enthusiasm shown for the magical tales of Mr. H. G. Wells, the more recent success of Christopher Morley's *Thunder on the Left*, and the highly successful production on stage and screen of *Alf's Button*, show clearly that the public delight in this kind of fairy-tale fiction.

Obviously, too, the fantasy is extraordinarily well adapted to serial requirements. Given your skin of a wild ass, your time machine or magical button, anything may happen, and, in skilful hands, much does happen in a riot of humour, adventure, and unexpected twists and *dénouements*.

Why, then, does the serial editor look askance at the fantastic story? Probably because it requires a highly accomplished technique to make the story plausible, and because the idea is usually novel and audacious.

The first objection is a very real one. The fantastic story is hardly one that a young and inexperienced author is likely to handle successfully. True, if the author can persuade the reader to accept his first premise—his invisible man, or his voyage to the moon—the rest

of his task will be comparatively easy. Afterwards his characters have only to behave as they would be expected to behave under such circumstances. But the first premise will be extraordinarily difficult to "get across." The description in which the hero becomes invisible, the hints, and clever revelations, the even more clever silences and reservations—such a task requires an expert pen.

A young and unknown writer might of course accomplish the task and achieve a fine fantastic serial, but even then it would probably be difficult to sell, or at least much more difficult than a more orthodox serial. Editors will probably tell him that his story isn't "convincing"—a word which is in constant circulation in editorial offices.

Most editors do not want audacious and startlingly new stories. This statement may come as rather a shock to the young author. He believes, possibly, that editors are simply panting for something entirely fresh and original. He has read, perhaps, in literature composed for his guidance, that he has only to produce a really new, original story to make his fortune and reputation at once.

This may be so. An original novel might make his fortune at one stroke. It would, however, be giving poor advice to a young free-lance fiction writer to advise him to tackle startlingly new themes.

Generally speaking, they are not wanted in the serial market. A man of established reputation might sell such a story, but the unknown author's chances are negligible. What is wanted from him, and what he can always sell, is *an old story with an entirely new twist*.

This is what the young author should aim at, if he is ambitious for results. The old love story, the ever-popular mystery and "crook" story, treated in a fresh and vigorous fashion, with, if possible, original situations, or situations having all the appearance of originality. Such a story, properly handled, will always sell. The editor regards it as an old friend and greets it accordingly. He knows its worth and selling power, and he has no misgivings when he writes his commissioning letter.

Our advice to the young author about to attempt originality in serial-writing is—don't.

This is the age of big business, we are told, and of syndicates handling commodities on mass production lines. Under such a régime the goods produced are apt to become standardised, and popular fiction is by no means an exception to the rule.

The big individual editor, himself responsible for the buying and contents of his periodical and himself a writer of ability, has given way to business men responsible to other business men above them.

Editors like Trollope, men placed in entire control of periodicals and given *carte blanche* by the publisher, no longer exist to-day. The influence of the individual writer is greatly diminished and business organisation is put in its place.

Once a man of genius like Edgar Allan Poe could take hold of a failing periodical, and by individual editorial efforts and personal contributions give that journal the largest of circulations.

It is doubtful whether anything like that can ever be done under the big business organisations of to-day,

and in consequence there has been a certain decline and fall in the status and relative positions of editors. If the chief editor of a big national newspaper left that paper to-morrow, and edited a rival organ, few people would even know of the fact. The great public would remain ignorant and unconcerned. The effect of the change would probably be slight. And the same thing applies to the various fiction editors.

It will be seen, then, why editors of serials do not desire anything startlingly new. To publish the work of an unknown author is always to run a certain amount of risk, but that risk is intensified enormously if the work of the young author is entirely unlike the well-known popular article. It may go amazingly—it may raise the circulation to an incalculable height, but, on the other hand, it may diminish sales in a horrible and terrifying fashion.

The familiar type of fiction by an unknown author is pretty safe, a new kind is enigmatic and disconcerting.

The horrible truth, a truth which few literary aspirants appreciate, is that editors are as other men—"prick them they'll bleed," and so on. They have a job to lose like any ordinary creature !

Consequently, if a story by a new author, written on conventional lines, happens to be a failure, and the serial editor is asked to explain, he can always tell his board that such a story as this by Mr. Dante Rossetti Smith has always hitherto been successful.

On the other hand, if Mr. Dante Rossetti Smith's serial has been a brilliant and audacious fantasy, the story set in ancient Carthage, and not containing a heroine, and if it proves a big failure (as it may !) the



editor who bought it will have a good deal to explain to his disgruntled directors.

The motto of most editors is to "play safe," both for their own sakes and for that of their paper. The young author should play safe also. He should avoid unpopular and unfashionable forms of fiction writing, and study the market requirements. Any originality he may be fortunate enough to possess he should use for enlivening, and making dramatic, a story of orthodox conception.

He should, at any rate at the beginning of his career, avoid unconventional forms or subjects that will appear speculative to editors. If in doubt the writer can always submit a synopsis of his story, or expound his idea in a personal interview if the editor will see him. The avoidance of work that is doomed to failure will save the aspirant much heartburn and wasted energy.

It is unfortunately true that an extremely good story may be turned down off-hand if it is of the wrong kind. The fiction editor may like it personally, may even be enthusiastic, but he is not going to risk his personal reputation and the circulation of his paper for the sake of a highly problematical success. Why should he? Let the young author gain a reputation by clever work in conventional fields, and then bring out his more daring plots.

The conventions of serial publication are only to be thoroughly discovered by considerable exploration. Many newspapers, which to the uninitiated seem to publish exactly the same kind of story, in reality differ

on essential points in their requirements. One paper, for example, will not like stories about married heroines ; another will not mind whether the heroine is married or not ; while yet a third will allow the heroine to be a wife " in name only."

A humorous serial—that is, one written entirely in humorous vein—would probably be barred by all newspapers. Humour is one of the most difficult things for any editor to decide upon, since taste in humour differs enormously.

Good humour is always extremely hard to find, and this may account for the fact that one never sees a humorous newspaper serial. More probably, though, newspapers don't want such writing. The readers of serials like to be thrilled to the very marrow ; they distrust levity, and for the most part take their reading *au grand sérieux*.

Religious stories, tales of spiritualism, life after death, or serious controversial matters would be a bad selection of subject-matter for the young author to try his hand at. Editors desire to please as many of their readers as they can, and to antagonise none. Above all they dislike angry and reproachful letters signed " Disgusted Reader " or " Father of Six."

Again, it would be as well to approach an editor with an idea before wasting energy upon the writing. One editor's meat is another's poison ; one might run as a " stunt " a story that the other wouldn't look at.

These conventions, though they may seem stupid or merely funny to the young author, are in reality quite serious. Failure to understand them may give him years of barren labour and disappointment ; may,

in fact, make all the difference between his failure or success as a free-lance.

The conventions of the newspaper serial are rigid, and though they change from time to time, usually remain fixed for many years. The world to-day is in a state of flux and revolution, more perilous and unstable perhaps than at any other period in history. Crowns have been struck from kingly heads, and empires have tottered, but the British newspaper serial changes little.

In the serial columns of one well-known London daily the "heroine" must on no account smoke a cigarette, and any author's reference to such a disgraceful procedure would be rigorously blue-pencilled. This is simply because the newspaper's directors find that their readers object to such conduct in a young lady they wish to respect and admire !

Curious, in these days of cropped and breeched virgins speeding dustily upon racing motor-bikes ; curious, when one's grandmother smokes in the hotel lounge, and one's sister makes frequent raids upon one's case. Curious, but true !

One is reminded of the editor who sent his serial author an urgent telegram bidding him call at the office. "Jones," said the fiction editor, "I see that next Wednesday you have in your story a particularly dramatic murder. Rather nasty, too !"

"Yes," urged the scribe. "But surely it is fully justified by circumstances ? When Lady Irma discovers that her husband has been carrying on an affair with Elsie Mainwaring, and then the Marquis, having found, as he thinks, that——"

"Oh, quite," said the editor. "Quite. The story

fully leads up to the murder ; it is perfectly plausible under the circumstances, but that is not my point. The fact is—" the editor leaned forward and instinctively lowered his voice—" the fact is," he said, " next Wednesday is Princess Mary's birthday, and I cannot have anything of an unpleasant nature appearing on that date in my columns " !

The story may easily be true, in spite of the fact that its sponsors are several Fleet Street journalists. Certainly our modern journal is nothing if not genteel, and when in doubt the editor uses his blue pencil.

There are certain definite and precise things that heroes and heroines of newspaper serials may or may not do. It is these conventions that hamper the author more than any others ; it is such dogma that so often results in lifeless, paste-board, immaculate figures instead of vital human beings.

The only advice one can give to the young author is to tell him to set his teeth and " stick it." However crazy the conventions may seem, there are probably reasons for them. Even when they are flagrantly absurd it is useless to argue with an editor. Usually he is only carrying out the instructions of his firm and expressing the personal outlook of his directors.

*Never argue with an editor about anything whatever ; he always has the last word.* If he tells you your story is badly written, faultily constructed, and wildly improbable, don't argue the point. Smile if you can, and agree heartily. If you can't do this, go quietly away, and come back at him later with another story. Argument will not help you, and it may hinder your selling this editor another story. Also, there is always the

faint possibility that the editor may be right in his judgment.

If you have talent you will be irritated by all kinds of apparently narrow conventions and by all manner of dogma. Talent, however, will carry you through all this if properly exercised. Sooner or later you will enter the Elysian Fields where dwell those fortunate mortals possessing "big names," and for them the conventions and slings and arrows of outrageous criticism have practically ceased to exist.

For these wondrous beings the barriers are down. Their heroines may be married or unmarried, or even divorced; they may write "historical" stories, or even fantasies; they can set their story in any part of the habitable or uninhabitable globe, and no one shall say them nay.

This, after all, is only fair. These demi-gods have presumably toiled, and suffered, and sweated, even as we have ourselves. They, too, have known the horror of those printed "regrets" that are more blessed to give than to receive.

Work within the rigours of fashionable current convention and orthodox editorial outlook. It will be irksome at first, but that state of mind will not last long. It is only the amateur and dilettante who wants his path made easy, and who starts like a nervous colt at the first sign of mildest criticism. The professional knows that honest and sincere criticism is difficult to get and is most valuable to his work.

The discipline of working within the limits set by the conventional market will be good for the young writer who has the real stuff in him. Writing is one long lesson

in the art of waiting, and to succeed in this inky profession requires the altruism and fortitude of a Christian martyr.

It is hard ; it is painful ; and it is devilishly self-exhausting. That is why the thing is really worth while.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FIRST INSTALMENT

*The importance of the first instalment—Novels that won't serialise—And why—Art and sensational fiction—The individuality of serial technique—Comparison with short story methods—Comparison with dramatic technique—Begin in the middle—Length of average first instalment—Difference between newspaper and magazine serials—Sunday paper serials—Recapitulation of chief points.*

THE first instalment is of paramount importance. By their opening chapters all serial stories are judged, and on the merits of the first instalment the story is bought or rejected. A bad opening damns serial fiction, for obvious reasons. A novel may begin slowly, even unattractively, but the reader, having bought or borrowed the book, is likely to continue reading. The first instalment of a serial, however, must definitely grip the reader's interest and make him determined not to miss the next instalment, in other words, buy the next issue of the paper. And that, as editors see it, is the primary function of the serial feature.

The greatest possible care, therefore, must be taken in the writing and presentation of the opening chapters. There can be no leisurely treatment of plot, no finely drawn analysis of character, no irrelevant introduction.

In the first few lines the reader must be, as an editor once said, on the threshold of the story.

The competent first instalment is a *multum in parvo* of drama, humour, suspense, characterisation, and atmosphere. The construction must be technically perfect. It is fatal if the wheels creak ; the mechanism must work with smooth precision. The importance of sequence, with its consequent suspense interest, is highly magnified. In the following chapter we reproduce a typical first instalment, with annotations.

There is an analogy that is often made in order to describe the working of a wireless transmitter. This analogy is a pool of still water, into which a large stone is dropped, causing a circle of waves that diminish towards the edges of the pool. In this rough comparison, the pool of water represents the ether ; the dropping of the stone is likened to the pressing of the transmitting key, the resulting water-waves give one an idea of the invisible wireless waves that travel through the ether.

When the stone is dropped, a swift agitation is produced in the tranquil pool, and the result is a smooth succession of waves. When the key of a wireless transmitter is pressed down an electric discharge produces waves that carry a message from sender to receivers.

This same analogy may be applied to serial fiction in order to give an idea of the functions of a first instalment. The opening chapters of a serial represent the stone dropped into the pool, or the primary electrical discharge in the ether ; upon the correct functioning of the author's first instalment depends the whole of the effect he may obtain. If the first instalment is badly constructed or tedious the serial writer will fail. It



is as though the key of his transmitter had not made correct contact ; there is no proper electrical disturbance in the ether ; no wireless waves, and no message is received by those who would fain " listen in."

It will readily be appreciated that the requirements of the first instalment are drastic. Not only has the opening to fulfil the function of the short story opening, *i.e.*, to arouse interest, and to strike the note of the story, but it must comply with certain rigid and artificial conditions. Take, for instance, the question of length.

For the average newspaper first instalment the length is five to six thousand words. One newspaper permits only 3,500 words. Yet in this relatively small space the author must (1) present a sufficient portion of his story to show the reader that a really dramatic tale is to follow ; (2) introduce his principal characters—seldom less than three—(3) portray their personalities so vividly that they are at once impressed on the reader's mind, and (4) provide at the end of his five or six thousand words a dramatic, suspense-stirring curtain which will leave the reader eager to read the next instalment.

As with the short story, the nature of the theme, or plot, must be foreshadowed at the beginning. To lead your readers to expect a thrilling series of strange adventures, only to develop the story later as an emotional love-romance—or *vice versa*—is to disappoint them. As a matter of fact, such a deceptive opening would never pass muster with any intelligent editor. Do not imagine that the reader likes to be absolutely in the dark. If that were the secret of fiction writing it would be a good plan to conceal from the reader the true identity of the

characters, leaving him to find out later who was the hero and who the villain. This camouflage method can only be used effectively in the mystery story. With this exception, the serial story must have a good many cards on the table with its readers.

No average reader would be straightway absorbed in a serial if he—more often she—did not at once know with whom to sympathise, whom to like, whom to dislike. For them that is half the fun of the story. The writer cannot afford to postpone the process of making it clear who are the characters meant to enlist the reader's sympathy, and who are—ultimately, or even at once—to be hated, feared, or despised. He must do all this in the first instalment.

Thus it will be seen that the writing of the first instalment calls for not only putting a quart or more into a literary pint pot, but also a certain boldness and sureness of touch which carries conviction. The first instalment must not read like a précis. This is the mistake most beginners make. In an effort to bring as much incident as possible into the first few thousand words they wield the blue pencil with such devastating effect that the result is virtually a summary of the original narrative. This is not what is wanted. To crowd too much into the first instalment is just as fatal an error as to have it devoid of incident and interest. The reader does not want too much crammed down his throat at once.

The first instalment must read easily and smoothly. Unless the story is skilfully dovetailed, each paragraph linking fluently and naturally with the next, the reader is liable to become bewildered. Both narrative and

dialogue must be natural and intelligible as the story swiftly begins its unwinding.

Many established novelists, failing to appreciate the requirements of the first instalment, also fail to understand why their otherwise exciting stories attract no serial buyers. Alternatively, in their attempts to write a story which will serialise, they overlook these fundamental requirements, and then wonder at their failure. With their style and form of presentation perfected by many successful novels, and conscious of their large and appreciative (book) publics, they are either unable or too proud to learn that the serial has its own technique and that the serial public is very largely a separate literary entity.

We mention this as revealing the advantage offered the beginner who is prepared to master the individual and difficult technique of serial fiction. We are safe in asserting, as a general proposition, that the serial editor gives preference to a good serial by an unknown writer over a story by an author with a big name which does not observe the rules.

On the other hand, the beginner has no easy job in planning a serial and constructing the all-important first instalment. Of the requirements which we have briefly indicated, unquestionably the most difficult is the rapid characterisation necessary. There are few more difficult technical tricks in story writing than this. The people in the story have to be so deftly touched in that they appear real, and sympathetic, and alive. This characterisation is even more important than that of the short story, since more is going to happen to the characters themselves. All their early actions and

utterances are consequently of great significance. Whatever a character says or does in the early chapters is the foundation on which the later developments of the story are based. This does not mean that the villain must be made to hiss "*Revenge will be mine!*" under his twitching moustache. The present generation of serial readers expects something more sophisticated than that, even if it be merely paraphrased to, "*We shall see,*" *he said with a suave smile.*

There is no reason why a serial should not be written at least as well as the average successful novel, and a great deal better than the average novel published. The fundamental difference between the newspaper serial and the novel lies almost entirely in the construction and technique of the first instalment. After the first instalment a serial to-day proceeds on very similar lines to those followed by the average action novel.

The action of many novels is just as quickly moving as that of a serial. Some of the greatest novels begin as abruptly and dramatically as any sensational serial, and contain all the ingredients of a sensational serial. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is an excellent example of what genius can accomplish with those same ingredients so dearly beloved in the transpontine melodrama. *Crime and Punishment*, too—the work of one of the greatest novelists who ever lived—begins sensationally enough, with a young student contemplating and planning a murder.

It is a mistake to despise any form of art, a mistake to generalise upon the elusive topic of what is, or what is not, art. Sensational fiction, even melodrama, may form the basis of a great work of art. In approaching

any form of work, the scientific ideal is the best ; " neither to love nor to hate, but to understand."

We have committed ourselves to the statement that the technique of serial writing is the most difficult in fiction. This statement may appear rather sweeping at first sight, but we make it quite deliberately and hope to prove the truth of the contention before we have finished.

First, lest we should be misunderstood, and our statement appear more sweeping than it actually is, we would point out that we are speaking only of technique.

No one would pretend, of course, that higher powers of conception, inspiration, or originality are required in writing a serial. In point of fact the conventions that undoubtedly restrict and limit the ordinary newspaper serial necessarily forbid any great or original conception. The subject matter of the ordinary serial is pretty sharply defined, and this is the reason why serial writing is despised in some quarters.

Yet the limits of subject matter for serials are broadening rapidly, and treatment is far less stereotyped to-day than it used to be. Also, it must be remembered that for a century and a half men of genius have occasionally entered the serial writing field and made of it whatever they wished. And there is no reason why this should not be done again, and done repeatedly.

Technique, of course, is something quite separate and distinct from the intrinsic artistic worth of a piece of work. The technique of a writer may be amazingly clever, and his stories bad, and *vice versa*.

It is, in fact, a condemnation of a writer if critics always select for praise his superficial technical acquirements. We do not say that great pianists like Paderewski, Cortot, and Moisewitsch, are "virtuoso players"; we do not want them merely to exhibit their technical brilliancy, but to give us a great rendering of great music. Similarly, we do not talk of Shakespeare and Keats as being "clever." They *are* brilliantly clever, but we take the cleverness for granted, forget it, and pass to higher things.

No writer should aim deliberately at being clever; if he is naturally brilliant, this will come out spontaneously in his work, but he should never try and force it. Nothing is more tedious than a mechanical attempt at wit when the natural spark is temporarily missing, *vide*, for example, some of Oscar Wilde's inferior work. Some are born clever, some achieve cleverness, but no one cares to have cleverness thrust upon him.

In technique the serial is a most difficult form. A good serial writer is the virtuoso of the pen. From him are demanded a facility and dexterity in handling a plot which are not essential to the novelist.

The novel form is, within wide limits, whatever the novelist cares to make it. His story may be any length, from the twenty thousand words of a Schnitzler story to the two million of a Dreiser; it may be just too long to be called a short story, or it may be long enough to fill a whole shelf with volumes.

In the novel there may be digressions, and repetitions; there may be chapter divisions, or no divisions at all. The story may take the form of a diary, or a collection of letters; it may cover the hero's whole life from the

prenatal state, as in *Tristram Shandy*, or deal only with a man's thoughts and experiences during twenty-four hours, in the manner of James Joyce.

In effect, the novel form is free from most arbitrary conventions, and is subject only to the novelist's own tastes and desires.

Now it will be seen at once that, owing to the way in which a serial is published, in short instalments daily, or weekly, the form that the story takes must be arbitrarily fixed—fixed, that is, by the peculiar requirements of the newspaper serial reader.

These readers demand a swiftly-moving story, that starts with a "kick," and ends with a stronger "kick." The story must start right away, dramatically, with the principal characters introduced deftly, and a strong, interesting, puzzling "curtain" arrived at—a "curtain" that so stimulates curiosity that the reader must go on with the tale.

Now this necessitates a very careful planning of the serial writer's story. He must start his tale at a dramatic point, and end his first instalment, in five or six thousand words, at a still more dramatic point. He has no leisure for vignettes of childhood and adolescence, or long studies of his hero's environment and family, as the novelist has.

The serial writer must introduce his characters whole and complete, in their habit as they will live in the pages of his story. To do this he must employ the technique of the short story writer, and describe his characters in a few vivid phrases so that they are fixed at once in the mind of the reader. But the serial writer's task is the more difficult since his characters are going to

experience so much more than are the short-story writer's puppets.

A short story usually seizes upon a single phase of the character's life, one or two emotional reactions, that occur swiftly and are soon over. The short story method of characterisation is adequate for the small canvas, but would be inadequate for a larger picture.

One of the most difficult technical accomplishments that confronts the serial writer, therefore, is so to present his characters in action, in a first instalment of 5,000 words, without fixing them in a manner which will prejudice their later development.

The more action there is in a story—and the average serial is packed full of action—the more difficult will adequate characterisation become. Unless a character really *lives*, nothing that happens to that character will interest the reader, and the more sensational and quickly-moving the story is, the more difficult it is for the writer to make his characters vital. This is one reason why the writing of first-class serials demands considerable technical ability on the part of the author.

It is, then, demanded of the serial writer that he should have the technical accomplishments of the short-story author, at least so far as the rapid presentation of character is involved. It is also demanded of him that he possess much of the technique of the drama.

The affinity that exists between serial work and writing for the stage is apparent to anyone who studies the two forms; and it is to an extent illustrated in the technical phrase, "curtain," so freely used in connection with the *feuilleton*.



The serial writer works from curtain to curtain, as the dramatist does; serial instalments, like the acts of plays, must culminate in a strong lifting of interest, or readers and audience will experience a sense of dullness and boredom.

The dramatist puts his characters on the stage all ready—made and fixed, just as the serial writer does in his first instalment. There can be no leisurely introduction of character, no subtle analysis of character upon the stage. When the curtain rises the audience are supposed to know nothing of the characters who come on except what the programme tells them. What the lives of these characters have been before the action of the play begins no one knows but the dramatist, *and he must know all about them.*

Only by knowing his characters intimately can the dramatist present them with such extraordinary rapidity, hit them off in a single illuminating phrase, and keep them talking "in character," and acting in character, and developing in character, all through the piece.

In short, a great deal of the dramatist's work is done before he begins to write his first act, and is done "off stage." The same technique must be employed by the serial writer if he is to produce a really good first instalment.

The number of characters that the dramatist may introduce is distinctly limited. Stage "crowds" work usually as one entity. To introduce too many characters, who would necessarily be vaguely defined, would be a great mistake for the dramatist, and the same rule applies for the serial writer.

Obviously, in a first instalment, few characters can be presented, and the more characters there are introduced, the less careful treatment can be applied to their delineation.

For the purposes of most serial plots, at least three principal characters must be introduced in the first instalment, and five, or an even greater number of characters, is more usual. It follows, then, that the greatest economy of words and the highest technical skill must be used to introduce, say, five characters, their environment and circumstance, in the space of five or six thousand words.

For this to be accomplished really competently, without any sense of rush or scamping, the technique of the dramatist is probably the best to employ. Before writing a line of a first instalment, it will be best to form an accurate image of each character to be introduced. Know definitely the appearance, age, circumstance, and mentality of all the characters, so that you can say with accuracy how they will speak and behave in any given situation. This means hard work, but it vastly facilitates the writing of a first instalment, and helps to avoid those mistakes that give one the tedium of rewriting.

When you see your characters clearly, you can make others see them clearly, and do so in the fewest possible number of words. For the serial writer, with only 5,000 words to play with in his first instalment, there must be no fumbling or vagueness. Characters must be drawn boldly, in a few strokes. It is only the bad artist who shades in around his drawing to hide the faulty outline.

The serial writer would do well to take another hint from the dramatist. To describe your character

in detail will not be economic, and probably inartistic—in any case, you can't afford the words. Don't *say* your hero is strong, manly, a little bitter, sardonic, a woman-hater, but with a saving sense of humour, etc. Bring him on stage, and show that he is all this, as the dramatist does, by dialogue. Make him talk bitterly, humorously, grimly, etc.; make others speak of him as they see him, but don't waste words in long descriptive passages and subtle analysis. In later instalments you can slip in touches that you had to leave out in your first 5,000 words, but do nothing to weaken the dramatic strength of your first instalment.

The novelist may devote three lengthy chapters to the thoughts of his hero as he lies, half-waking, half-sleeping, in bed, but that sort of thing, excellent though it may be, is not serial work, any more than it is the work of the dramatist.

Good dialogue is always more dramatic than descriptive matter, and for a writer who can handle dialogue it is probably a safe rule always carefully to consider getting his facts across to the reader in this form rather than in any other.

In a serial, passages of dialogue should never be too long, and they should be broken up by descriptions of the characters' mannerisms and actions and an emotionally treated description of the surroundings, but the more experienced writer will find that many dull facts that the reader must know can be enlivened out of all recognition by dexterous handling of dialogue.

In this respect the clever dramatist is without a peer. The exigencies of stage-craft have forced him to see everything through the medium of dramatic dialogue,

especially in these days when the soliloquy is looked at askance. The serial writer can learn much by studying the drama and dramatic method, for its technique is one that he must discover how to use.

The beginning of a story is not the proper place to start a serial. A serial should start abruptly in the middle, and in this it again resembles the drama.

Bernard Shaw, in his dramatic criticism, remarked that "bad playwrights begin at the beginning; good ones begin in the middle, and men of genius, like Ibsen, often begin at the end." The literary aspirant who is capable of understanding this epigram will also understand much of the technique of dramatic writing and the writing of serials.

It would be a useful exercise for the aspirant to consider what is the end of a story. One class of story will end at the point where the heroine is married, while another will make this the starting point.

Plots can frequently be found by examining one's ideas for stories, or examining a story one has just read, and asking this question: What would be the natural, or possible, consequences of the story you are planning, or have read? And then, having worked out plausible consequences, begin writing a story where these consequences begin. It is by some such method that most mystery and detective stories are constructed. The writer works backwards with dramatic effect.

The serial is comparable, as we have seen, with the

drama, but in construction and treatment it differs widely from the ordinary novel. The serial travels at a much faster pace. Serials are designed to be read in small daily instalments, small because of the exigencies of newspaper space; and serial readers undoubtedly like quick action and a degree of excitement which would be oppressive in a novel.

The human mind cannot endure a long-drawn-out suspense; it needs rest and repose. Nothing is more tedious than too much excitement without relief of some kind interspersed; it is like a constant staccato in music. Consequently the leisurely method of the novel is out of place in serial writing.

The "crook" or mystery novel approaches nearest in form to the serial and is often serialised with as much success as it obtains in book form. The "domestic" serial approximates more to the novel form than the "crook" serial, but even in the milder domestic story the serial must move faster.

For this reason serials usually need retouching by the author before they have good prospects of appearing in volume form. Ingenuity on the part of the writer may obviate this necessity or at least simplify his subsequent labours, but the novice who tries to write both serial and novel at the same time, unless his theme particularly lends itself to the process, is running the risk of falling between two stools, producing neither a saleable serial nor a novel fit for publication.

To return to the first instalment we must deal with some further aspects of this important subject.

It is essential that the first instalment should read like the first chapters of a *long* story, and not the

beginning of a *short* one. Many well-written first instalments are rejected by editors because the whole story as foreshadowed in these early chapters could be decisively concluded in a second instalment. The fact that the author optimistically attaches a synopsis showing that the complete story will run to 60,000 words does not necessarily impress the editorial eye.

Readers of a serial first instalment must feel beyond shadow of doubt that a long, satisfying story is coming. All kinds of issues and developments should be foreshadowed.

A serial writer should always examine his first instalment carefully to ensure that it gives no impression of being a short, or even a shortish, story, and that it could not possibly or feasibly be wound up in a further two or three thousand words.

The length of the average newspaper first instalment is five to six thousand words. The Sunday papers vary from a shorter to a much greater length than this, while some of the weeklies, like *Answers*, *Tit-Bits*, *Ideas*, and *Pearson's Weekly* vary considerably in the lengths they require. *Pearson's Weekly*, for example, uses a serial first instalment of ten to fifteen thousand words in length.

The reader will have noticed that we exclude the magazines from our consideration. The important magazines are hardly the concern of the young writer trying his hand at the serial. Magazines like the *Strand*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Nash's Magazine* do not publish the regular serial at all. They serialise the work of well-known popular novelists, whose work will appear later in book form, and whose stories are written primarily as books, and not as serials.

Technique here is utterly different. Magazine instalments are so long—often 20,000 words—that the stories printed appeal in precisely the same way as a book. The story is not given to the public in small sections. Magazine readers are regaled with a full hour or two's reading of their favourite author, almost as if they had the book in their hand. It is true that they will have to wait a month for another long instalment, but it will be a *long* one, and in this question of instalment length is involved all the technical difference between the orthodox serial and the novel.

We are dealing mainly with the conventional serial for which there is the biggest demand. Moreover, it is the newspaper serial which offers the widest scope to the new writer.

The serials which appear in some of the Sunday newspapers are only half the length required by a publisher for book form. This is because only one short weekly instalment is possible, and a long story would have to be carried for many months. The minimum novel length that the average publisher requires is 60,000 words—most publishers prefer more—and most newspaper serials run to 60,000 words. Some of the Sunday papers, however, do not, and a writer who thinks he has a story that will make a good novel as well as a good serial should hesitate to sell it to a Sunday paper requiring only a 30,000 word story.

He must consider whether he is prepared, first, to condense his story to the short Sunday paper requirements, and, secondly, to rewrite it later and expand it to book length.

Because of this consideration some of the Sunday

papers pay the author more than a daily would do. At any rate, the author can always use this argument for raising the price of stories sold to such Sunday papers !

A simple and convenient way of planning a first instalment is to divide it into three chapters, say, of 2,000 words each. The simplest type of serial first instalment might introduce the heroine (always more important than the hero), her environment and circumstances, in the first chapter ; the hero, and his environment, in the second. Both chapters would foreshadow dramatic developments. In the third chapter—the last section of the first instalment—heroine and hero would meet, leading up to the *dénouement* or “curtain.”

This “one, two, three” method of planning a first instalment may be done in only two chapters, or in five, but three is somehow a convenient and generally acceptable plan.

Let us now recapitulate the chief points in the construction of the all-important first instalment :

- (1) The average length of the newspaper first instalment is five to six thousand words.
- (2) It doesn't matter how good your main story may be, unless your first instalment is properly designed and written your serial will be rejected or, at the best, will have to be entirely rewritten.
- (3) Do not introduce too many characters into a first instalment. Too many characters confuse the reader ; also, the more characters to be introduced, in the space available, the less effective is the treatment that can be given to their individual presentation.
- (4) Begin the story in the middle, that is, at a highly dramatic point.
- (5) Begin dramatically, and go on dramatically, subordinating



everything to the final curtain you have in mind for the end of your instalment.

- (6) Know all about your characters before you begin to present them. Do not fumble with your description of them, or work out as you go along what they are going to be like. It would be best, if you have any doubts, to write a description of each character before you begin your story, and also to ask yourself how they would behave in various sets of circumstances.
- 7) Be careful that your first instalment foreshadows a varied series of exciting events. The first curtain should arouse tremendous excitement and curiosity, and leave such cravings unsatisfied. The object of a first instalment is to make readers buy the next issue of the paper.
- 8) Be quite sure that the story portrayed in your first instalment is not capable of being easily and plausibly wound up in a second instalment of two or three thousand words. Be certain, in fact, that you have written the first instalment of a serial, and not three parts of a long short story.
- (9) Study dramatic technique and dramatic dialogue. You will find this useful for the rapid presentation of character, and for conveying essential information to the reader.
- (10) Study the short-story writer's methods of presenting character, physical peculiarities, etc., in short, vivid word pictures.

A word about characterisation. So vivid an impression must your characters make on the reader, and so rapidly must you get this effect, that characters usually have to be overdrawn, as in melodrama. Heroes must really be heroic, and heroines all that sentiment and Barrieish "charm" can demand. Subtlety and finely drawn analysis of character will be wasted, though it may help to sell book rights later on. But, in the first instalment at least, don't be subtle or "clever." There isn't room.

Serials should be written in a quick, nervous style. There should be nothing sonorous pompous or heavy in the style of the story. Avoid long descriptive passages, prolonged dialogue, and dwelling too long on any one point of interest. Split up the interest, and make everything move quickly. This is particularly desirable in the first instalment, in which not a word should be wasted from the opening sentence to the final curtain.

The novice should make a careful study of first instalments as they appear in different newspapers, noting how they differ from one another—for each paper has characteristic preferences—but noting also the highly individual technique which is common to all good serials. The observant young writer can best appreciate serial requirements by intelligent examination of the serials *which editors buy*.

## CHAPTER V

### A FIRST INSTALMENT ANALYSED

*We print in this chapter, by consent of the author, a typical first instalment, with marginal annotations. The story was published in the "Illustrated Sunday Herald" with the title of "Under False Colours."*

### CHAPTER I

MR. REGINALD OUTRAM ripped open the envelope, and after a sour grimace signifying his dislike of the faintly-perfumed paper, began to read the letter that his secretary had just brought in to him.

*Dear Mr. Outram, he read. At your request, I am returning, under a separate cover—I believe that is the correct business expression—the third act of your simply thrilling play. I am positive that "Spoils and Stratagems," though unlike your usual work, will be a huge success, and I should like to open with it in the autumn if we can arrange things satisfactorily. It only remains, therefore, for us to conclude our business arrangements, and I can proceed with rehearsals immediately.*

*The story opens quickly with a letter, conveying essential information to the reader.*

*There is just one tiny favour that I wish to ask of you, and it really needs all my courage to put it before you, especially as I am aware of your well-known distaste for anything in the way of blatant advertisement and vulgar puffing.*

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*There is just one tiny favour that I wish to ask of you, and it really needs all my courage to put it before you, especially as I am aware of your well-known distaste for anything in the way of blatant advertisement and vulgar puffing.*

*The story opens quickly with a letter, conveying essential information to the reader.*

*The fact is that in launching out on my own and going into management as I am about to do, I am appalled at my own temerity. It needs so much experience, and I am young, as actress-manageresses go. The rental demanded for the King Edward Theatre is simply terrifying, and altogether I feel that I need every kind of assistance that I can possibly summon to my aid.*

*So, out of my great need, I ask you to allow me to use your photograph and some biographical details concerning yourself for purposes of restrained and legitimate advertising. I know—everyone knows—that you have never been photographed before, and for that very reason a picture of yourself would be of invaluable assistance in ensuring the success of your latest play and my new theatrical venture.*

*Will you be so kind as to send me a photograph and some details of your life, which I assure you will be used in a fashion subject to your approval? It would so help things!*

*Sincerely and hopefully yours,  
Anne Maitland.*

*Character and physical peculiarities touched in quickly in short story manner.*

Mr. Reginald Outram read this effusion through twice, with many nervous clickings of the tongue and drumming of knuckles upon his desk, then he rose and began to pace the book-lined room. As he walked he trembled slightly, and on his face was a look of fear; a look that rapidly passed and gave way to one of calculation.

He was a very thin, tall man, with a scraggy neck that reminded one of a fowl. His eyes were of a peculiar light shade of blue, almost colourless. He affected a beard of straggling and untidy proportions, and his general appearance was unkempt to the verge of eccentricity.

Of a sudden he stopped in his restless pacing

and pushed savagely at the button of a bell fixed to his desk. His secretary appeared in the doorway.

"You want me?" inquired John Marshall.

"Yes. Come in, Marshall. Come in. Look at this! Tell me what you think of it."

John Marshall's eyes ran over the large sprawling, feminine writing on the perfumed paper, and he smiled slightly as he read.

"A little stilted in style," he observed.

"Possibly the lady was nervous. A charming woman, though, I should say."

"Charming woman!" exploded Outram.

"Nervous? Rubbish! Low cunning, Marshall."

Marshall shrugged his broad shoulders.

"If the request for a photograph annoys you," he remarked, "you can either ignore it or refuse."

"Refuse? H'm. Not so easy, confound it! I am just on the point of signing an agreement with this woman. It's difficult to refuse gracefully."

"After all," said the secretary, "the publicity would be useful. It would be all the more effective because of its unexpectedness. The recluse emerging from his lair after long years of concealment!"

Outram clicked his fingers with nervous impatience. His face showed white and drawn through his rough beard, save where two red spots glowed angrily high up on either cheek.

"It's out of the question," he snapped.

"You've been with me long enough to know my principles. I abominate all advertisement. Nowadays, instead of producing the goods, people content themselves with shouting at the tops of their voices that they *are* producing the goods. So long as they can sell things that

way what does it matter what sort of muck they turn out? Well, that's not my method. I believe in giving of my best and saying nothing about it!"

"Very well," said Marshall. "Then, of course, you will refuse the young lady's request."

Outram ignored the remark.

"A photograph!" he exclaimed. "To ask for a photograph, as though I were a picture post card beauty! They have my work, haven't they? That's self-revealing enough for anyone with the wit to see it. A photograph! What does the public want with an old playwright's photograph? By Jove! I've a good mind——"

He stopped, while a grim smile hovered over his lips. He looked excitedly at his secretary:

"By Apollo!" he said. "Here to my hand—the ram caught in the thicket! John Marshall—why, you were made for the part!"

"What do you mean?" said Marshall. "I——"

"Yes. You, John. Why, you're the very one. You know all about the play. You're young, handsome. Why, your photograph will grace every flapper's mantelpiece as soon as it's published. No, don't say no. You simply must do this for me. It's the way out. See the young lady for me. I give you full power to assume my name, rank, and title, for the occasion."

"You're not serious!"

"I am. Never more serious in my life."

"But it's absurd. Some one will spot the thing. Your appearance must be known to a few people."

"Not in this country. In America, one or two know me, not more. Come now, John. It's a simple thing that I'm asking you to do."

*The plot  
begins. Note  
how much  
quicker the  
tempo is than  
that of a novel.*



"It may not prove so. Suppose Miss Maitland wants me to sign an agreement?"

"Then sign. You're my business agent. If the contract seems good to you, sign it."

"I don't like it at all," said Marshall. "If you are really serious——"

"I am," said Outram testily. "I feel seriously about this." His voice took on a coaxing note.

"Come, John, you've been with me some time, and we've got on well together. When I found you in New York you wanted a job badly. You were without friends or relations, and I took you on without references. I don't like to mention this because you've served me well and repaid my confidence. You've put up with my whims, my desire for solitude, lack of servants, and all that sort of thing. But I want you to do this little thing for me, and if necessary I must remind you of your position in New York."

John Marshall went very red.

"That's all right," he said hastily. "If you take this thing seriously, of course I'll do as you ask. After all, I suppose if anyone is to take your place it should be your secretary; still, it seems a mad scheme to me—it's bound to be discovered."

"In that case, I'll take the blame," said Outram.

"Meanwhile, if it's convenient to you, perhaps you'll call on Miss Anne Maitland to-morrow?"

As his secretary left the room Outram once again picked up the actress's letter and read it, and as he did so the smile vanished from his face, leaving it grave and strangely apprehensive.

"I wonder?" he murmured softly. "I wonder?"

*Repetition of a hint already given that Outram's position is not so simple as he would have it appear.*

## CHAPTER II

*Character and  
personal  
appearance  
swiftly  
touched in.*

JOHN MARSHALL paid off his taxi, and took a swift glance at the cream-painted house with its bay windows and bright flower-boxes.

Now that he had to face Miss Anne Maitland he felt more than a little nervous. A man of natural sincerity that bordered at times upon the painfully blunt, he wondered how he would be able to sustain the rôle thrust upon him by his eccentric employer.

True, he had been well coached for the task before him ; he knew all about the play, *Spoils and Stratagems*, and he had mapped out in his mind what he intended to say. Yet the interview promised to be long, and there would be many opportunities for self-betrayal.

In answer to his ring a neat housemaid opened the door, and surveyed with approval the well-fitting morning coat that John had deemed necessary for London wear.

Yes, Miss Maitland was in, and was expecting Mr. Outram. Would Mr. Outram step inside ?

John stepped—with the feeling of a Daniel for whose sake no miracle can be expected.

He was shown to a room cheerful and bathed in sunshine.

John stood and looked about him for a minute or two with keen appreciation. Then he sat down and waited.

There came the sound of a light step ; the door of the room opened, and John had forgotten his surroundings. He rose quickly.

*A fuller  
description is  
given of the  
heroine. In  
this type of  
story the  
heroine is*

Anne Maitland was lovely enough to make most men forget the inanimate objects about them. Tall and slim, with a wealth of gold-brown hair that varied from flax to deepest tints of reddish gold, she carried herself with the easy grace of the accomplished actress.

Now her face was wreathed in a smile that

was friendly and, somehow, charmingly deferential. Her brown eyes looked at him quite frankly, but without a hint of boldness or self-consciousness.

John decided that her photographs did her less than justice. As he took her outstretched hand he more than ever regretted the necessity to deceive such a woman.

"Do sit down, Mr. Outram."

The voice was in keeping with the face and figure. A soft, caressing voice, capable of infinitely subtle modulations, a voice to stir women and men to the very depths of their beings.

"It is very good of you to come all this way to see me. I was, perhaps, overbold to ask you."

John raised a protesting hand.

"I am more than repaid for my journey," he said, and flushed as he spoke, as though there were no fifteen years that separated him from his school-days.

There fell a little silence, and she eyed him with approval, taking in the well-built figure, the strong, tanned face, with sensitive, clean-cut lips, and finely modelled head with dark hair thinning slightly at the temples.

"You are very kind," she murmured at length, and then: "Do you know, Mr. Outram, you are not a bit like the man I expected."

He smiled.

"You expected an older man, perhaps? I have had luck."

"Not luck," she protested. "I am sure of that; your plays are wonderful."

Her brows puckered in a serious meditation that John found delightful.

"It is not only that I expected you to be older," she said slowly. "I expected you to be different. There is something in your work,

*most important. It would have been better, in fact, if it had been possible to introduce Anne before the others. The plot made this impossible.*

*Indirect description is better than direct.*

not exactly a bitterness or a cynicism—it is above that—but a maturity, a melancholy acceptance of the sadder aspects of life, a grimness that is not suggested at all by your appearance. Do you mind my talking to you like this ? ”

“ Not at all. It is most interesting. Like most people of my trade, I am extremely interested in myself. It is, I hope, introspection rather than egoism.”

She laughed.

“ I can acquit you of egoism, since you have journeyed all the way from the country in order to do me a service.”

“ That could only be called self-sacrificing by one who never saw you.”

“ For that,” declared Anne Maitland, rising, “ you deserve a better luncheon than I shall be able to give you, I fear. My cook left hurriedly two days ago, in the way that cooks have. Betty, the maid, is carrying on—but I feel that some kind of warning is necessary.”

In a pleasant little dining-room that overlooked Regent’s Park they sat down to a luncheon that needed no sort of excuse for its existence. There crept into their conversation a degree of intimacy that John found both wonderful and charming. He found Anne Maitland a woman of the world, travelled, well read, and with that instinctive and sympathetic insight into another’s thoughts that is a woman’s greatest charm.

They discussed America, where she had played with success, and he had travelled extensively. He gave her some details of his life—according to plan, it was the details of John Marshall’s life that he gave—and she listened with glowing attention.

*Information is  
conveyed to the*

He related how he had been left penniless and an orphan when his father died just after

John's seventeenth birthday. He had had to leave the school at Eastbourne abruptly, and the 'Varsity had become for him an impossible dream. Then had begun the days of his vagabondage and struggle. He told it all quite simply, like a boy who has found a perfect confidante.

"And despite all these handicaps you have made yourself what you are!"

Anne Maitland's eyes were soft, and bright with an admiration she took no pains to conceal. John flushed scarlet. In the midst of his narrative he had forgotten for a moment the false colours under which he was sailing. The admiration on the girl's face made him feel an unutterable cad. He made a vague, deprecatory movement.

"I have been talking too much about myself," he said. "Please forgive me. My life has been a lonely one for some years, but that is no reason why I should abuse your kindness."

"It has been wonderfully interesting," she said softly. "No apology is necessary for such a romantic story, and besides that is what we have met for. These are just the sort of details I require for our publicity campaign—that is, if you have no objection to my using them?"

"Oh! None whatever," John stammered. Again he spoke according to plan and his employer's instructions.

"In that case I must make some notes of the wonderful things you have just told me."

"There is no necessity, Miss Maitland. I have anticipated your wishes, and typed out some biographical matter in narrative form."

John flushed wretchedly as he pulled the typescript from his pocket, and felt more than ever ashamed of himself as he saw that the girl

*reader as quickly as possible. Dialogue here would be too long.*

*Here the reader is reminded of the story's title, and its significance is indicated.*

*Love interest  
begins  
immediately.*

mistook his embarrassment for a natural modesty.

"This is so good of you," she exclaimed. "And they give you the reputation of a cynical old hermit! Well, I can deny that wherever I hear it!" John was conscious of a dazzling smile, and of a warm glance, wholly feminine that came from eyes soft, brown, and tender.

"But why, Mr. Outram—if I may be allowed to ask—do you lead this existence of an anchorite? Why shut yourself away from a world which has so much to offer to your talents and your energy? You are young, and even if some great sorrow has afflicted you, the years teach us that there is always some compensation if we like to look for it. Am I very presumptuous to lecture you in this fashion?"

"You are extremely kind," he said hastily. "Perhaps some time, later on, I may take your advice, and lead a more normal kind of existence. At present, rightly or wrongly, it seems to me out of the question."

The conversation became more businesslike. The subject of the photograph was mentioned and John produced a cabinet-size likeness of himself.

They chatted over their coffee very pleasantly until John began to feel it was time to go. Just before he left, Miss Maitland rang for her secretary, who brought in a legal-looking document that proved to be an agreement for the producing of Outram's latest play.

"If you will just read this over at your leisure, Mr. Outram," the girl said. "I should like to have everything arranged in order, as I am anxious to proceed with rehearsals as soon as possible."

*The plot  
moves forward,  
the hero.*

John ran his eyes over the paper and found things perfectly satisfactory.

"I'll sign now, if you wish it," he said.

"This is nice of you," she said, and as John signed his employer's name, with practised facility, she crossed over to a desk, and wrote out a cheque.

*committing himself to impersonation quite definitely.*

"Here is a cheque for a hundred pounds, Mr. Outram," she said. "That binds the contract, as it were. You will let me have the revised third act as soon as is convenient? I am so glad we have met, and I hope we shall become quite friends. Good-bye!"

John Marshall pressed her small hand and took his leave. His brain was in a whirl with the strain of sustaining a part and trying to appear natural at the same time. Even now that he had come out of it satisfactorily he wondered whether things had not gone rather too easily. Where was it all going to end?

### CHAPTER III

ALONE, in a first-class carriage bound for Strathbourne, John Marshall gave himself up to reflection. Part of it was a delightful reverie in which Anne Maitland's gold-brown hair and brown eyes, sparkling with intelligent sympathy, had a large share. Part of it was bitter anger that he should have met this charming girl in such a way—as an impostor, a hypocrite.

*Here is the keynote of the whole story—love under false colours.*

It was Reginald Outram's talents that had won the girl's sympathy and friendliness. It was for Reginald Outram's powers as a dramatist that Anne Maitland's face had glowed with enthusiasm. It was not John Marshall's early struggles that counted; it was what she had imagined John Marshall had done later that weighed with her.

Would she have been as kind if she had known he was only the great man's secretary?

Would his courage in fighting early misfortunes have counted for much in her eyes if she had known him for John Marshall? He answered these questions in the negative.

For the hundredth time John asked himself why he had accepted the preposterous mission from his employer.

It was true Outram had been kind at a time when John desperately needed kindness. Without Outram's assistance he would probably have starved in New York. Still, he had surely repaid Outram in full. What other secretary would have put up with Outram's eccentricity and whims, the dullness of this constant life of seclusion, the dramatist's brooding melancholy and fits of irritability?

John gazed through the window at a green strip of swiftly-vanishing meadow, and suddenly smiled. His introspection had led him to the real cause of this vexation. It lay in the fact that Anne Maitland was a beautiful woman who had made an undoubted impression upon his hitherto unsusceptible nature.

If the actress had been a plain woman this perfectly innocent deception would never have worried him, he would probably have regarded it as a joke.

He could never see her again. He repeated this to himself, and the train took up the phrase and jolted and shook with a dull mechanical reiteration of the words.

How could he see her, and where was the use? He was a confidential secretary with a salary of four hundred a year. Anne Maitland was famous as England's youngest actress-manageress, and her income for a week probably exceeded his half-year's salary. Never could he meet such a woman upon equal terms, except as an impostor.

The train crawled reluctantly into



Strathbourne as though fearing to find itself unwelcome. John stepped out on to the little sunlit platform, with its spreading fruit trees and its name lettered in whitewashed stones. He passed through the barrier and, crossing the bridge, began to ascend the hill that led to Faute de Mieux, Outram's cynically named cottage.

As he walked up the tiny garden path it struck him that despite the summer sun and the scent of the roses the house had a depressing air about it. The cottage, like its owner, was wilfully shabby and neglected in appearance, shut in, close, and rather mysterious.

In the hall John stood for a moment in grateful appreciation of the coolness, then he went to Outram's study, knocked at the door, and entered. Outram was not there. A heavy scent of tobacco hung about the room, but its owner was nowhere to be seen.

It was queer. John went out into the hall and called his employer's name aloud. His voice echoed through the tiny house, and sounded strange to his own ears; still there was no reply.

John grew apprehensive. The possibility of Outram's taking a walk he dismissed immediately. His employer seldom left the house from one week's end to another, and when he did it was always late at night; the silence and the darkness, he had often said, helped him to think.

John went all over the house, but there was no sign of Outram anywhere, and his hats and his walking-sticks were in the hall.

Suddenly John thought of the secluded garden at the back of the cottage, and the anxiety left his face immediately. Of course Outram was there, absorbed in a book, unconscious of his secretary's noisy return.

*Attempt to  
get atmosphere  
for coming  
tragedy.*

*Information  
necessary to  
the plot.*

*The story  
sharpens to  
tragedy and  
action.*

John ran out into the garden, and a moment later stood perfectly still, gazing fixedly at what lay before him.

On his face, lying on the gravel path as flat as a starfish, was Reginald Outram. Beside him lay a long ladder that had evidently slipped from a fruit tree. One arm was twisted under him, but the other protruded, and in its white fingers was clenched a briar pipe. He lay quite motionless.

Swiftly John stooped over the quiet figure and made a hasty examination. There was no sign of life.

John Marshall turned away, and with a white face hurried out of the house. At the garden gate he was turning to the left, when suddenly, from the corner of his eye, he saw a little two-seater car, coming from the opposite direction. A black-coated figure was at the wheel, driving at an easy pace towards the village.

John waved the silk hat he had unconsciously put on again when he left the house, and shouted. The car came towards him and stopped.

"Something wrong?" inquired the black-coated man, as he stepped out into the road.

"Very wrong, I fear, Doctor," said John breathlessly. "You have saved me a mile and a half's run. Come this way, please."

He turned once more to the door, and as he did so he envied the doctor his professional coolness. The sight of Outram's sprawling figure had upset John considerably.

"I thought I recognised your car," he said, speaking nervously, as he led the way out to the garden at the back. "It's the only one of its kind in the village, Doctor——"

"Smith," put in the other, in a soft, caressing tone. "Rupert Smith. I came here three

months ago. We have never met, but, of course, I have heard of you——”

He broke off as the figure on the gravel path came into view, and he bent over Outram's prostrate form with a little hiss of indrawn breath.

John Marshall stood by helplessly. Some birds chattered and fought in the ivy, and a slight breeze stirred the leaves of the fruit tree overhead.

John watched in fascination as the little plump doctor made his methodical examinations. A shaft of sun fell on the back of the medico's head, and revealed the fact that he was partly bald.

Dr. Smith straightened himself and tilted his hat back to the crown of his head. It struck John as incongruous that there should be two black-coated, silk-hatted men in this tiny country garden of sun and roses, and a dead man lying between them.

Dr. Smith stroked his fair beard and spoke:

“Ah!” he said, with a professional eye fixed upon the peculiar nails of the fingers that clasped the briar pipe. They were of an exaggerated “filbert” type—very rounded and convex from quick to tip. John himself had often remarked them, and thought them curiously beautiful.

“Valvular insufficiency,” murmured the medico. “Your man suffered from heart disease, I see.” He was not looking at John. “Those club nails, and the blueness of the face—undoubted signs, you know.”

“I suppose,” John said abstractedly. “there will have to be an inquest, Doctor?”

“I think not,” said the other, smiling with grave reassurance. “It is obvious that this poor fellow was suffering from heart disease—this heat is severely trying for such cases,

*Attempt at  
realistic word  
picture to make  
the tragedy felt.*

You can no doubt corroborate the fact of heart disease? I shall simply certify in the ordinary fashion, Mr. Outram."

John Marshall started.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered.

The little doctor turned swiftly.

"I said you could corroborate the existence of heart disease, Mr. Outram," he repeated.

*The climax  
of the first  
instalment is  
reached.*

In a flash John recognised the doctor's mistake. His eyes went to Outram's shabbily-clad body, the old suit, and the carpet slippers, secured by string. The error was obvious, and easy enough to make.

He hesitated before replying, and through his mind hurtled a thousand rapid thoughts. Outram was dead, and only that day he, John Marshall, had passed himself off for the dramatist. Moreover, he had taken a bearer cheque for a hundred pounds from Anne Maitland, and signed a contract with Outram's signature. By doing so he had committed a forgery.

What was he to do?

Outram was dead, and explanations were impossible. In John's pocket was a cheque for £100, which he had obtained by signing his dead employer's name. How was he to explain this away? Who would believe his story?

John clenched his hands, and tried desperately to think. Could he accept the position thrust on him by Outram, and continued in error by the doctor? Could he carry it on for a few days, just long enough to get away?

Why not?

No one knew Outram by sight, and the doctor said there would be no inquest. He tried to think of anyone in England who knew Outram by sight, and failed.

"You seem upset, Mr. Outram. You had grown attached to the man, perhaps?"

The little doctor's soft brown eyes were fixed upon John with a queer intensity.

"Yes," John said, trying desperately to make his voice sound natural. "Yes, I was quite fond of him. He had been with me some time."

"Ah! well, death comes to us all sooner or later," said the doctor sententiously. "Good day, Mr. Outram. I shall see you later." He looked fixedly at John for a moment and then abruptly held out his hand.

John Marshall shook the other's hand mechanically. He was trying to quieten the riot of his brain. To think out clearly just what kind of a position he had plunged himself into.

*Here is the curtain, leaving the reader with the feeling that a complicated story is coming. The reader's curiosity should be aroused, and left unsatisfied.*

TO BE CONTINUED

## CHAPTER VI

### VARIOUS TYPES OF SERIALS

*Crook, detective and mystery stories—The art of getting sympathy—A new type of fiction—Changing fashions in detectives—Value of a well-created character—The surprise element in "crook" stories—The rules of the mystery story game—The obligation to play fair—Stick to simple solutions—Murder as the most popular crime—The boys' serial—Love stories and domestic serials—Real and manufactured curtains—The problem story—Popularity of religious themes—The importance of a good title.*

AMONG popular forms of serial fiction "crook," mystery, and detective stories take high rank. The "crook" story differs from the mystery in that the former need not necessarily have any mystery in it. The writer of a "crook" story may, or may not, keep his readers in the dark as to the main developments of his plot. A mystery story, of course, is a kind of battle of wits between author and reader, and it is essential that the author should win this battle, or outwit at least the great majority of his readers.

The "crook" story is merely a quickly-moving tale of crime and its opposing forces, in which the powers of the underworld fight against the powers of light, represented chiefly by hero and heroine, who may or may not be detectives. The "crook" story, in fact,

belongs to the same class of fiction as the detective and mystery story, but is wider and freer in its scope. It supplies the same kind of thrill as the mystery and detective story, which usually deals with a particular mystery or problem.

This class of fiction enjoys wide popularity and is growing continually in public favour. Stories of this type are written for "boys of all ages," and vary from crudest murder and horror to the subtlest problems of criminal psychology and mental deduction. Schoolboys and schoolgirls, tired business men, eminent scholars and politicians desiring relaxation, all read fiction of this type, and the work will vary as much in quality as the minds of its readers.

The fascination which this kind of fiction has for the young author lies in the fact that it is relatively new. In comparison with love and domestic stories, the crook and detective yarn is a modern invention.

It is, in fact, only since society reached a certain stage of civilisation that it has been possible to represent the detective as a romantic figure and the criminal as a despicable rogue. In primitive societies, and in primitive minds, sympathy is nearly always on the side of the picturesque outlaw and the offender against the law. Robin Hood and Dick Turpin are the heroes of our boyhood, and a hundred years ago the Bow Street runner and the thief-taker were anything but heroes of romance. The police in primitive countries receive little aid as a rule in the tracking of a criminal, and unless the bandit actually plunders the local peasantry, or injures them personally, they will aid him in every way in their power.

This sympathy with the underdog and the harassed fugitive is a powerful and instinctive thing in human nature. Even to-day, in a civilised society taught to understand the essential baseness of criminality, the author of detective fiction must take precautions lest his readers' sympathies swing in the wrong direction. His villains and criminals must be very black indeed, and handled with an uncompromising lack of sympathy, if he wishes to hound them down and deliver them to justice with the approval of his readers.

On the one hand is all the might and majesty of the law—and there are always some misgivings that "the law is an ass"—and on the other hand is—usually—one poor, isolated individual. Out of a simple love of fair-play the reader will always hope that the solitary individual opposed to organised society will win, unless the writer paints the criminal in a way that will exclude sympathy. The villain must not be compounded of all villainy; at the same time the reader must be made to feel that in the end he gets no more than he deserves.

Considerable skill is required in this holding of a reader's sympathy. A villain must be an interesting character because so much of the effect of your story depends upon him. He must be clever in order that your detective should prove himself exceptionally astute. The cleverer he is, the more credit to your detective-hero for frustrating his criminal schemes. An almost ideal villain is the sinister Professor Kreuzemark created by that new and able writer Francis Beeding. The Professor is a real menace who makes your flesh creep, yet he is not a mechanical puppet who merely does one wicked thing after another. He has personality and a sense of



humour ; you feel a little sorry for him, yet profoundly relieved when he gets his deserts.

The villain, in fact, should have a certain fascination about him. He should be human, not a catalogue of all the vices without a single redeeming virtue, as he is usually depicted in transpontine melodrama.

One quite difficult thing in fiction writing is to show a "crook" as he should be shown, for story purposes, cleverer than he actually is in real life, more fascinating, and yet really despicable. At the same time it is difficult to depict masculine virtue without snobbery or conscious superiority, and feminine virtue without insipidness.

So many detectives arouse our homicidal instincts through their vast and condescending superiority ; whilst many dashing "crooks" are ruthlessly hurried to justice when we would gladly see them escape.

When the reader's sympathies sway in the wrong direction it is because of some defect in the author's technique. A good writer will not only get sympathy exactly where he wants it, but he will even shift sympathy from one character to another, and direct it, at one time for a character, at another time against that same character, in the same story.

The detective story is quite a modern product of the fiction writer's art, and should appeal to the young writer because of the opportunities it affords him.

There is a steady and probably a growing demand for "crook" and mystery serials, and for anyone with the knack they are a profitable type of story. For one thing, it is comparatively easy in this type of story to design

a first instalment that will be highly sensational and enormously arouse the reader's curiosity.

Secondly, a mystery serial, properly written, will nearly always make a good novel, and will not require the rewriting of first chapters that is nearly always necessary in order to convert "love story" serials into novels. The demand for mystery stories in book form is unabating.

Thirdly, there is a prevailing fashion for "crook" plays, both in this country and in America, and, if the writer of a "crook" serial has not the technique to convert his story into a play, he may yet have the good fortune to collaborate with someone who can do this for him successfully. And there are great potential profits in a good "crook" play.

The young writer must beware of being behind the times with his "crook" or detective story. The work done by Edgar Allan Poe, Gaboriau, Conan Doyle, and Hornung, excellent as it is, would never be bought to-day by a serial editor. It is dated. The mention of a chase across London in a hansom cab would kill almost any story, however brilliant it was in its day. A detail? Yes, but details are important.

New inventions, new crime developments, the thousand and one novelties of life to-day—these are pressed into service in the new type of story. The mystery story is still comparatively untouched and offers attractive scope to the young writer with ideas and ingenuity.

Because of its novelty, the detective story offers great scope to the young writer. A theme so modern must always be adapting itself to new requirements, and keeping itself alive by fresh brains.

In comparison with what has been done in love and domestic stories, the mystery story is an untilled field. For centuries every kind of romance has been written, but a perfectly new type of "crook" or detective may be created to-morrow, and probably will be.

Characterisation here is most important. If a series of detective stories, written around one central character, is to have a chance of popularity, the central character must be boldly conceived, well drawn, and must grip the reader's imagination.

Sherlock Holmes is, of course, the classic example. So popular and influential did he become that for a time few detective stories written in this country did not more or less imitate the wizard of Baker Street. This was a mistake. It was generally unsuccessful because most of these "creations" had no vitality of their own. There are, of course, characteristics in Holmes that would not be popular to-day. The critical taste of the public has altered considerably since vast numbers waited eagerly for the latest number of the *Strand* containing the newest Sherlock Holmes mystery. Dr. Watson, designed cleverly to represent the average man's intelligence in those days, now appears, to put it mildly, a fool, and his questions and earnest efforts to help now have a naïveté which at times is ludicrous. Sherlock himself is rather lacking in humour to the modern mind, and if the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were launching Holmes to-day his hero would probably be drawn in a lighter manner. Something like perfection in this light modern representation of character is achieved by H. C. Bailey in his "Mr. Fortune" stories.

A detective should always, of course, be a little aloof

in his relationship with others ; there should always be a certain arcanum of mystery around him, and no one should know him with too gross a familiarity. At the same time, the modern mind seems to demand that he should be rather a jolly sort of man, a good fellow, and quite "normal."

Incidentally, a detective should never marry. The moment a detective marries his glamour is lost for the real connoisseur of detective fiction. Even in a long mystery story it is best to keep your detective free from the tender passion. If the writer feels that he must have a love interest in his story, let him introduce a minor character—an assistant to the detective, or the wrongly accused hero—and marry him off at the end of the story.

It is well to remember that if you create a good detective character you will want him again for a second and third story, and if he ceases to be a bachelor he will never be so interesting again. A good detective character may be a valuable asset to a writer ; in fact any kind of character that hits the public taste, and around whom various stories may be written, is of enormous value to its creator.

The writer who has once produced a Sherlock Holmes, Captain Kettle, Don Q, or an Educated Evans will find it easier to think out plots for his character than to create a fresh character and fresh plot. To work from character to plot, instead of from plot to character, is not only the soundest way to work, it is the easiest. It is easy, too, once having created a popular character, to sell even slight stories about that character.

The young writer who hits on a good detective or

"crook" character should consider very carefully what he is going to do with something that may prove a valuable property.

If he marries off his detective, or reforms his "crook," he may find it difficult to handle another story about the same character. Mr. Edgar Wallace usually has a love interest in his detective stories, and, after marrying his detective, creates a new one for the next story. But then, Mr. Wallace is so extraordinarily prolific that rules applying to the average writer do not hold with him. If a writer is producing seven or eight long detective stories in a year, it is probably wiser for him not to run the same characters too often.

We have described the mystery story as a battle of wits between author and reader. The "crook" story is a similar duel on a smaller scale—a light engagement. It is not necessary in the "crook" story that the reader should be baffled by the main developments of the plot, but it is essential that the element of surprise should be well maintained.

The writer of this kind of fiction should be as a superior chess player is to an inferior opponent: always a move or two ahead of the reader.

The reader will expect certain developments from a certain situation, but, in the well-written "crook" story, he will never get exactly what he expects. If the writer cannot be continually outwitting and surprising his readers, then this kind of story is not for him.

In this duel of wits between author and reader, certain rules should be observed by the writer.

In a mystery, the clues to the explanation of the tangle should be carefully and fairly woven into the story.

Sufficient facts for the reader to discover the solution of the mystery should be there, if the reader has the wit to read the signs aright.

Having put such clues in conscientiously, the writer will employ all his skill to cover them up artistically and honestly, and to draw red herrings across the track—also quite fairly. Absolute misstatement is taboo in a good mystery story, and if characters in the story make statements that are not true, it should be clear that the character's statements are not also those of the author. It should be plain that these characters may have mistaken views.

Once the solution is revealed, the reader must be in the frame of mind to say "Of course! Why didn't I think of it before!" Consequently the reader must be supplied *early* in the story with sufficient data to apprehend the truth of the mystery. It is not good enough to be told in the penultimate chapter that the butler of the murdered man had a Sicilian brother who had always sworn to murder his brother's employer. It obviously is not fair for the real murderer to be introduced late and casually into the story after the reader has been allowed to suspect all and sundry for twenty previous chapters. The ideal solution to all stories of this type is a simple one, and the whole art of writing the mystery story is not to let the reader suspect it, yet, when it is revealed, to satisfy him completely with that unexpected solution.

One of the best and cleverest mystery stories of modern times is Mr. A. E. W. Mason's *House of the Arrow*. Here all the clues are given fairly to the reader, and he can follow the detective almost step by step. It is fascinating

to re-read this story and note the consummate skill of the construction.

The ideal mystery story is complex in plot and extraordinarily simple in explanation. Where the explanation of a mystery involves pages of subtle reasoning, or lengthy scientific lectures of esoteric character, such stories will almost certainly fail. The ordinary reader, unable to grapple with the explanation given, and having to take much on trust that he cannot see for himself, will feel he has been "done"—even as he felt when the tardy butler's brother from Sicily was introduced.

Detective stories that turn on last minute scientific discoveries are often of this nature. Bolts drawn back by electro-magnets; photographic miracles in connection with finger-prints; wireless "stunts" known only to the experts—these things will only confuse and annoy the average reader, however much trouble the author takes to explain them. The reader of the mystery story could not think of these scientific solutions, because he was not equipped with the necessary scientific knowledge. To him, therefore, the author will not seem to have played fair. To the average reader such mystery stories cease to possess the character of fair and square mysteries, and assume the quality of fairy and ghost stories.

When scientific knowledge has been spread abroad and become generally known it can be used in popular fiction, but until it is widely known it is better to refrain from using it.

For the most popular forms of mystery and "crook" stories—stories intended for the cheaper class of periodical—it is best to give your readers plenty of blood. To such readers there is only one fascinating crime, and that

is murder. Robbery on a gigantic scale may interest them, and blackmail may arouse their curiosity, but for the real "kick" that they want from your story, human blood must be shed, and human life at stake!

Somehow, too, one feels that this kind of story should always be set in a great city. The detective and "crook" in the great open spaces, or even in a country village, always seems oddly out of place. Telephones, telegrams, police, and all the devices of modernity, appear to fade into insignificance in "God's great out of doors."

Probably the bulk of mystery story readers are urban dwellers. They understand a chase in a taxicab; they know something of the swindler who lives in big hotels, and they like the luxury of expensive metropolitan life. But the country leaves them cold. Woodcraft is a thing that they don't understand, and they don't particularly want their favourite detective to understand it. As a rule, the detective will appear as much out of his element in the countryside as the majority of readers would be if actually there.

It would, however, be unwise to lay down any hard and fast rule on this point. If a young author has a keen appreciation of Nature, and gifts of tracking in the open, by all means let him use such knowledge in the writing of detective stories if he wishes to. Quite fascinating stories have been done on these lines, and may be done again. It remains a fact, however, that most of the best detective stories seem to have a metropolitan setting.

There is always a certain demand for boys' serials, but the market is the close preserve of a few specialists, and unless the newcomer has an irresistible urge to write



this kind of serial fiction, allied to the peculiar ability which the work calls for, he will be well advised to leave this particular field alone. If for no other reason, there is discouragement in the fact that, as expert T. C. Bridges points out, the market is getting steadily worse. Perhaps our boys grow up too quickly nowadays.

The most popular of all stories is the love story. If we have not dealt with this type first, it is because the romantic tale is so wide in scope as to defy analysis.

The serial love story is fairly conventional in form, with a well-defined code of morals for hero and heroine, as we have pointed out in a previous chapter. This ethical code for heroes and heroines varies with different periodicals but remains always "safe." Nothing is likely to appear in a modern newspaper that will bring the rosy flush of shame to a maidenly brow or cause the advertising revenue to fall away in horror.

There is a constant demand for the love story serial with a domestic setting, and such stories are constructed in the same way as the mystery story. The story should be planned in the required number of instalments, and the author should devise a lifting of interest at the end of each instalment.

The curtain in domestic serials is, of course, much milder than those in "crook" and mystery stories. Domestic serials are written chiefly for quiet home-loving people who, for the most part, regard excitement as morbid and immoral.

At the same time "curtains" are required, and the first instalment should be packed full of love interest

and emotion. The "curtains" of the first few instalments of all serials should have the maximum amount of "kick" required—and permitted!—by the periodicals they appear in. Later, as the story progresses, and grips the readers, and as readers have made up their minds to go on buying the periodical, then the "curtains" may become milder.

In a well-written serial, however, the interest of the story will grow until the main climax, and there will be no dull or "manufactured" curtains.

A manufactured curtain is one that is not justified in the following instalment, a "catchpenny" trick, mechanically, and not organically, contrived. Some of the worst of the old serials were full of such manufactured curtains. Thus the end of "Instalment 2" would read like this :

White-lipped, her breath coming in quick gasps, Lady Adela watched the handle of the door turning. In a moment the villain who had ruined her son, and wrecked her own life beyond repair, would enter the room. She raised the small deadly revolver in a steady hand, and waited.

As the door opened, her white finger crooked about the trigger of the weapon, and her blue eyes were ablaze with hate.

(End of Instalment 2)

Instalment 3 of the story would open something like this :

Into the room came Lord John Winter, and looked about him vaguely. Lady Adela's face was deadly white; there was a mist about her eyes, a queer buzzing in her head. Slowly, she lowered her revolver, and dropped it upon the table. She could not shoot. She could not fire the shot that would send this poor shivering soul unshriven to his grave.

And so on, in a long and maddeningly rhetorical passage. This kind of curtain, it is needless to say, lets the reader down badly. The writer of this kind of stuff is only bent on getting an exciting curtain, and is so lazy and unscrupulous as to manufacture a faked exciting situation which proves later not to be exciting at all. If a story is properly constructed this kind of "curtain" is unthinkable; the author will have enough story to tell without having to pretend to more than he possesses.

Another kind of love interest story is the tale with a domestic setting that is at the same time a "problem story." This kind of serial will present some problem of ethics or sociology, show up some injustice in human law or society, or challenge the reader's attention and sympathies with some kind of propaganda. It is very often rather stronger meat than the ordinary love and domestic serial.

The following summary may serve as an example of this kind of theme :

A perfectly decent man and woman, after having been married for some time, come to the conclusion that their marriage has been a mistake. They do not love one another. The woman, in fact, finds that she loves another man, and the story would probably open at the point where the woman and her lover discover that their love is mutual.

The lover, like the wife and husband, is quite a pleasant character, and, this being the case, all three are anxious to solve their difficulties in the best and wisest manner.

The wife goes to her husband, and tells him that her marriage has been a mistake, and that she has just discovered that she loves another man. In this scene there

is no acrimony, and no reproach. The husband agrees that the marriage has been a mistake. He is anxious that his wife should have her freedom. They discuss the question of divorce.

At this point the "problem" begins to present itself. For these two decent people to have a divorce there must be a victim for the law, that is, there must be a criminal --blackguard husband, unfaithful wife, or something of the kind.

They discuss this quite calmly and rationally. Neither loves the other—though there is mutual esteem—and consequently there is no heat, though there may be sorrow, in their discussion.

The husband wishes to frame up a case so that his wife can divorce him. But he is a doctor, dependent upon a stiff and formal class of patient. He will lose considerably if he is publicly divorced. The wife will not hear of this sacrifice.

Consequently, if the husband is not to be the victim for divorce, the wife must be. And the "problem" comes to a head when these two ordinary people, only guilty of making a mistake as to their feelings for one another, arrive at this conclusion. If the husband is not to be financially ruined, the wife must allow herself to be divorced, and risk unfavourable public opinion. If she must be proved unfaithful to her husband in the eyes of the law, there is only one person with whom her name can be decently coupled, and that is the man she loves, and who is waiting to marry her.

With two men and a woman of perfectly conventional morality this situation will have all the appearance of tragedy. The reaction of the decent lover to the situation ;

the emotions of the woman herself, the attitude of the husband—all these factors could be dealt with in various ways to make a “strong domestic problem story.”

This is an ordinary theme, but it will serve as an illustration of the problem story. Possibly it would be too “strong” for the more conventional papers; possibly it would need “a big name” and exceptionally good characterisation to market the idea successfully.

It is a fact, however, that many “best-seller” stories present some kind of problem, that is, they propound a question, and then attempt to answer it from one point of view or another. The question or problem raised, in the most popular fiction, is seldom very deep or subtle, but it is one possessing a broad human interest that will arouse most people’s curiosity.

Mr. Geoffrey Moss’s *Sweet Pepper* balanced in the scales the wages of sin and the wages of virtue, and showed the dramatic consequences of a wrong choice, or, perhaps, one should say of a wrong outlook on life.

*Simon Called Peter* is another popular treatise on current morality, and the works of Sir Hall Caine, and the late Miss Marie Corelli, sell in thousands because they possess ethical appeal. The great public are essentially religious in mind. There is nothing they love more than a sermon, especially when it is sugar-coated by a fiction writer’s wiles and served up as a sensational novel.

*Should a Woman Tell?* is the kind of title that arouses immediate curiosity. The great majority of people love an argument, and love to discuss some problem of moral conduct where the for and against certain procedure is nicely balanced.

Anyone who imagines that religion is dead, and **is**

worried by the reflection, can take comfort by examining the modern press and popular fiction. There is no more popular feature in journalism than a well-written article on religious matters, or, better still, some vigorously written polemics.

An article entitled "If Christ Came to London?" could be written by the right type of author over and over again, and always arouse great interest. Nothing brings such large correspondence to a newspaper office as a religious controversy.

Similarly, the religious theme, sincerely introduced into fiction, always arouses interest, and is frequently very popular. The writer, however, must be sincere, and this is the last kind of story that can be done with "tongue in cheek."

The number of popular novels with Biblical titles must be enormous, and the appeal of such titles is strong, because they are already familiar before the story is published, and have all the appearance of a well-known book. *The Prodigal Son* ; *Neither Do I Condemn Thee* ; *A Certain Rich Man* ; *Where Love Is* ; *A Thief in the Night* ; *Barabbas*.

This kind of story title has associations, all ready-made, and all introducing ideas into the potential reader's mind, and stimulating his imagination before he even reads the story.

A book title based on some well-known quotation and especially a Biblical quotation, is nearly always good. If there is also a hint of ethical problems in the title, as in Mr. Andrew Soutar's *Neither Do I Condemn Thee*, then it has a very good chance, as far as titles can help, of becoming a "best-seller."

Titles are of enormous importance in serials. Fiction editors spend many feverish hours in a desperate attempt to find the one perfect title that will fit the serial they propose to publish.

Sometimes the author finds a good title, and in this case it is possible—though not probable—that the author's title will stand.

Usually a little group of pale-faced, earnest men, pace to and fro in an office, biting their nails and scowling at the fittings, for many an hour, before the right title is found. And, when the right title is hit upon, an anxious scouring of a catalogue will generally show that it has been used already!

It is common for editors and authors to jot down a good title when one occurs to them, and very often such a title may come in quite smoothly and fit perfectly for a story written years later.

Good titles are usually made up of two, three, or four words. One-word titles are generally considered bad, because they can only describe the contents of a story in a vague and general way.

Titles like *Intolerance* may be all very well for a "super-film," but they are too vague for a serial. The film people like short titles because they can be displayed in electric light signs over cinema palaces with comparative ease, whilst two, three, and four word titles mean large and expensive lighting space.

*Vaudeville*, *Greed*, *Mannequin*, excellent for film purposes, would be bad serial titles.

Titles of two and three words are the best for popular fiction. It is calculated by advertising experts that the human eye can take in four words, of average length, at

a single glance ; two words, or three words, are probably better for really effective display.

A fiction editor has to consider questions of "make-up" and display type when choosing a title for a newspaper serial. A long title, stretching across four or five newspaper columns, could not be well displayed in effective type, either in the periodical or upon broadsheets.

The author, therefore, in selecting the title for his serial, should consider the point of view of editor and advertiser. Give your story a pithy title, well indicating its chief points and significance, and short enough to be effectively displayed to the public.



## CHAPTER VII

### "SERIALS I HAVE WRITTEN"

#### BY TWELVE FAMOUS SERIAL WRITERS

*(At our invitation, several of the most successful serial writers have contributed to this chapter synopses of their published serials, together with notes of their experiences in this field of writing. These should be not only interesting, but invaluable to the young writer, for they represent the outcome of long and successful experience. The synopses of published stories will, it is hoped, be particularly valuable, as indicating the types of story which meet with editorial favour. Whatever may be said and written about the technique of serial fiction, nothing is more likely to put the beginner's feet on the road to acceptance than these practical comments by recognised experts. To read with intelligent appreciation the contents of this chapter is about the best advice we can give the serial aspirant.)*

*We gratefully acknowledge the kindness of the authors who have so readily contributed to this chapter for the benefit of the young and unknown writer.)*

#### ARTHUR APPLIN

*(Mr. Applin, in addition to many successful novels, has had such wide experience in the writing and marketing of serials that we asked him to give his views at some length. The following contribution speaks for itself.)*

SERIAL writing is a business which should not be lightly undertaken. I use the word "business" in relation to writing,

and that is how a beginner should regard it, though writing can be an art, whether it is the writing of short stories, plays, or serials, for it should appeal to the taste of sense and beauty even as painting, sculpture, or music. The writing of a serial story requires a special skill. The technique is infinitely more difficult than that of the novel writer ; in writing a novel one has only to consider oneself and one's public ; very few authors give the publisher a thought until the novel is finished—though I will admit that authors often think long and furiously when the time comes to find that necessary and maligned intermediary between themselves and their public. In serial writing it is advisable to forget oneself, one's ideals, and one's ideas as to what the public wants and to consider only the editor. He may not be able to write a single chapter himself, but he reads more words than the most prolific author could ever write, and, though he seldom bears any resemblance to the lilies of the field, Solomon in all his glory cannot rival him for wisdom.

So put your trust in your editor as you would in a ship on which you proposed to start on a perilous voyage ; though he turn you down a score of times and treat the contents of your brain much in the same manner as the ship in a rough passage treats the contents of your stomach ; tighten your belt, keep on trying, and you may eventually succeed in catching his eye and a cheque from the cashier's department.

A serial story must conform to certain laws. These laws are strict and, at one time, were exceedingly narrow ; to-day the serial writer has more scope and freedom than he had ten years ago—but he has none of the freedom of the novelist.

The first law is that, in the first instalment of your serial, which may be from three to ten thousand words in length, you must introduce your principal characters ; each must be briefly but vividly drawn so that it is impressed permanently on the mind of the reader. This instalment should resemble the first act of a play, working up inevitably to the curtain which will

fall just as the interest of the audience, in this case the reader, has reached a high pitch of tension or excitement.

I have found the theatre of inestimable value to me as a serial writer ; the manufacture of a successful *feuilleton* closely resembles the manufacture of a successful play. Before commencing to write a story I visualise it as a play ; I choose my theme, then my characters ; conceive a number of events happening in the lives of these characters in relation to the theme I have chosen, and arrange these episodes into instalments.

Just as the dramatist develops the plot of his play, arranging it in two, three, or four acts, dividing one or more of those acts when necessity occurs into two or three scenes, so do I arrange my *feuilleton*. There is a similarity between play writing and serial writing, with this handicap against the serial writer : the longest play does not consist of more than four or five acts, divided occasionally into as many more scenes ; the shortest serial story has at least ten to twelve instalments, divided into fifteen or thirty scenes or chapters.

It is true that some plays have been saved and even made successful by a brilliant last act, but this could never, under any circumstances, apply to a serial story. Any author who knows his business can write a last instalment ; any author who has learnt his business and knows the tricks of the trade ought to be able to produce a good first instalment ; but it is the ninety-nine intervening instalments on which the success of the *feuilleton* really hangs and which show whether the writer knows his craft thoroughly, is an artist or merely a cheap-jack—a salesman who fills his window with stuff that looks first-rate, turns on a blaze of electric light and, having caught his customers, supplies them after their first purchase with shoddy or second-hand goods.

It is an old axiom at which certain people will always smile, but I have proved it to be true, at any rate, in the making of stories, that honesty is the best policy ; in other words, nothing succeeds like sincerity !

Don't make the mistake when you have learnt the technique of serial writing of believing it is "easy money," that you can go on using the same characters with different labels attached to them, the same old incidents and situations time after time. If you do this you will begin by despising your reader ; in other words, you will write with your tongue in your cheek, and eventually you will be found out—by your reader. Moreover, you will end by despising yourself, and the author who loses his self-respect is lost indeed · you may find him in gaudy paper covers of shilling shockers inviting you from the windows of doubtful shops or in serried rows on railway bookstalls : always a lovely, half-clothed lady or a bloodstained villain decorates the cover of his book, which cover often costs more to produce than the author will ever receive in royalty fees.

These novels are purchased by travellers who, when they are tired of looking at the scenery, glance casually through the pages ; at the journey's end they are swept up by the cleaner, who will sometimes tear off the cover and take it home to be framed and hung on the wall of his cottage or villa.

The serial is not for the traveller, it is for the family ; it is read in the home, and sometimes even in the office by those impatient to get to the next "act." The serial writer has an enormous audience consisting of men and women of widely divergent tastes and occupations, a vastly different audience from that of twenty years ago. His readers are all, or nearly all, intelligent, vitally interested in their fellow-creatures, curious about themselves, as eager to learn about life as they are to enjoy it. A splendid audience, responsive to truth and sincerity and with a keen sense of humour. That is why I believe, having mastered the trade of serial writing, a young author should concentrate on *character* ; the plot is a secondary consideration, and, after all, life is seething with drama, and drama only comes into existence through the clash of wills of people with strong personalities and vivid characters.

When I am asked to write a serial story and I have

discussed with my editor the theme he thinks suitable, I immediately—and quite subconsciously—begin to look for my characters among the crowd I meet as I leave his office, in the street, the tube, the restaurant, the theatre. Plot, drama, thrill—I find them in the eyes of nearly every individual; there is a story in that plain, simply-dressed girl sitting opposite me in the bus, her large eyes staring over my shoulder through the windows into—space. There is a story in the bronzed, lean man who comes suddenly into the Carlton or Ivy Restaurant with a well-known dancer whose white face, red mouth and corn-coloured hair make a startling contrast to her escort; he has just returned from Nigeria, where for years he has been trying to wrest gold from tin, or perhaps from Borneo and a rubber plantation, or from the silver mines of Lorraine.

Down on the Embankment on an iron seat an old woman in rags and tatters sits sleeping, with a ridiculously large-brimmed hat drooping over her furrowed face, a hat that possibly years ago graced the head of a duchess. If that hat and those rags that cover the old lady's bones could speak—and they will if you have ears to hear—what stories they could unfold; and the old lady herself, once a lovely girl, a mistress, a wife, a mother? Perhaps her son went to Nigeria or Borneo or the silver mines of Lorraine. . . .

Down the river a police boat glides; from the Savoy Hotel the music of the tango; beneath the plane trees a luxurious Hispano Suiza car rolls silently along, inside an old man, bald and fat, his hands clasped across an expansive white waistcoat; his head rolls slowly to and fro as he sleeps, dreaming of the millions he cannot spend.

Stories! They are clamouring to the serial writer to be told. The difficulty is not in finding but in selecting them, and the simplest way, I have always found, having settled on the theme of your story, is to select the characters you think suitable, pick them out from that wonderful, lovely crowd, your brothers and sisters with whom you rub shoulders day

and night in every city of the world, house them most delicately and lovingly in your heart, let them live with you until you know them intimately, until they have discovered to you their weakness and their strength, their virtues and their vices. For a space dream their dreams, suffer with them, sin with them—and then paint word pictures of them for your reader.

You must make a stage on which they will play their parts ; arrange a setting ; let them meet, speak, and you will find instantly they will begin to act for you ; they will live in your story as they have been living in your brain ; so eager, they, to be up and doing that you will find your pen is a most inadequate medium with which to translate their emotions and desires. If you have drawn them truly and sincerely you will discover that they themselves have developed the plot for you. They insist on action ; they refuse to sit still and do nothing ! Be careful they do not go too fast ; you will have to hold them in leash so that you may ring down the curtain at the critical moment of the first instalment of their lives, which is the first instalment of your story. And that curtain you will find can fall most naturally ; your characters from life will provide the necessary thrill and you will not have to invent one. If a murder is necessary, one of them will commit it most naturally for you ! Trust your characters, it will not be necessary to insist on alarms and excursions, detectives from Scotland Yard, seductions and six-shooters.

Many serial writers make the mistake of putting everything into the first instalment, starting with a thrill and working up to a crescendo, leaving the reader intrigued but bewildered, knowing he will have to read the second, third, perhaps fourth instalment. By this time, however, his interest is slowly petering out ; relying entirely on incident, not on character, the reader discovers that he doesn't really know, and has no interest in or affection for, the people who have been going through harrowing situations. It is too late to clothe them in flesh and blood, so the author has to find fresh incident, fresh excitement, pile Pelion upon Ossa, straining the

reader's credulity and his own imagination to breaking point. The final curtain is run down in a hurry and the reader turns to the next serial with a sigh of relief—and the author to *his* next serial with a shiver of repulsion.

This sort of thing cannot be kept up for long. There are still plenty of mechanically made stories, but the number of readers with mechanically receptive minds grows less and less. The great majority of serial readers are women, and women don't sit at home, they go out nowadays into the world to fight and to work. They want to read about the people they see, as it were, on the other side of the road. They still want mystery, they want romance more than ever, but it must be woven around real people, human beings like themselves. Let the writer remember that a murder in their lives is a rare event, but people are falling in love, children being born, men married, fortunes made and lost every day ; these are the real romances of life—and the purchase of a new hat, the making of a new dress, a chance visit to a night club—what strange and wonderful events may not lead from one of these simple actions !

When the beginner is going to write his first serial story don't let him go to Scotland Yard, rather let him dive into the tube at rush hours, drink a cup of coffee at Lyons' Corner House, eat a meal at the Ritz or Savoy ; take a stroll at mid-night along the Embankment—and catch the last bus home in the early hours of the morning. If he has eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart that understands, he will find in his pen not only remuneration but recreation.

This is a brief synopsis of one of my recent stories.

### THE REVUE GIRL

Dawn Amery was the daughter of a farmer living on Dartmoor. She had been well educated and was ambitious and found no outlet for her energies on the farm. She has

a lover, Harker, who has worried her by his attentions for some time, and one evening of storm and flood he tries to take her by force on the banks of the river. She struggles with him, and he falls into the river. She thinks he is drowned, and runs away intending to go to London.

At the wayside station Peter Merivale, an actor-manager, stopping his car in order to get a box of matches from an automatic machine, finds her waiting for a train. She is original as well as beautiful. He talks to her, offers her a lift to London, and persuades her to get into his car. She can't explain why she is running away, but allows him to think she is married and leaving her husband. He is a decent sort of fellow, and finding she has no friends and very little money, gives her a job in the chorus. He is the first real man she has met, and she falls in love with him.

Harker reappears, pesters her, and attempts to blackmail Peter Merivale. She tells Peter she is not married to him, and he is instrumental in getting rid of Harker. Most of the girls at the theatre are very kind to her, but of course she doesn't know her business and is slow at learning it, so she falls foul of the stage-manager and the conductor, and Peter warns her she will never be any good as an actress.

She wants to succeed for his sake as well as for her own, and, convinced he will never love her, she runs away again hoping to forget him and at the same time to learn her job.

As soon as she has gone Peter realises he is very fond of her; he also feels a sense of responsibility. Dawn gets a job in a fit-up melodramatic company. She has a very bad time and eventually gets her notice. She refuses to give in, and the next engagement is in a second-rate revue company touring small towns.

Peter tries to find her, and is helped by Ruby, one of the girls in his company who, among others, has been in love with him but has the sense to realise she is not the woman to whom he can give his heart. Eventually Peter discovers her in the north of England in a pierrot show, where she is quite a



star, and he realises her talent lies in broad comedy. He also discovers that he really loves her, but she is proud and won't believe it. He persuades her, however, to come back to London and gives her a good contract in his next revue. Here, with the experience she has had, and having discovered her *métier*, she makes a success, but refuses to show her heart.

An accidental meeting with Harker again—who is on his way to America, and who tells Peter that in the past he had been Dawn's lover and that was why she tried to kill him, has the effect of strengthening Peter's love and spurs his sense of chivalry. He takes Dawn back to his flat, breaks down the barriers that have risen between them, tells her he loves her and that as far as he is concerned the past doesn't matter and begs her to marry him.

She agrees, only telling him at the last moment that Harker lied and that she has never given anything to any man. The conventions of the serial are upheld, and probably Dawn and Peter live happily ever after, having the usual number of children, motor-cars and theatrical successes.

### T. C. BRIDGES

*(Has contributed serials to "The Captain," "The Scout," "Chums," "The Children's Newspaper," and many other juvenile papers. Has also written serials for the "Daily Express" and other newspapers. Author of "The Squirrel's Life Story" (Black), "The Young Folk's Book of Discovery," "The Young Folk's Book of Invention," "The Young Folk's Book of the Sea" (Harrap), etc., etc.)*

If the editor of a boys' paper favours me with a commission to write a serial, my first question is "School or Adventure?" Roughly speaking, all serial stories for boys—and girls—may be divided under those two headings. Incidentally, I would mention that in my own experience girls like the adventure yarn at least as well as do their brothers.

There are two sorts of school stories, one the knock-about, comic type in which some merry youth is always tumbling into all sorts of trouble and getting triumphantly out again; the other having a more or less serious plot. For instance, a boy who for some reason starts his school life under a stigma and makes good. The best story of this sort that I have ever read is *Barred* by John Goodwin, published years ago in the *Boy's Realm*.

My own best story of this type was one called *Paddy Leary*, in which a boy from the Australian backwoods arrives at a big public school, utterly ignorant, not only of the rules and ways of an English school, but also of English life. By sterling honesty and native wit, joined to a useful pair of fists, he not only makes good but breaks up a ring of bullies, and in the end does yeoman service to the school itself. Impossible, you will say, and perhaps so, but the job of the serial writer is to make it seem possible and his public will precious soon tell him if he fails in this respect. For boys and girls are stern critics. If they do not like a serial story they write to the editor and tell him so in plain terms, yet on the other hand they are equally ready to praise the yarn that takes their fancy. Indeed the object of every writer of what is termed juvenile fiction is to produce or invent a character who shall be popular with his readers. If he once does this he has struck a valuable asset. *Paddy Leary* lasted out to some 300,000 words, but that is not a circumstance to other favourite heroes I could name. Take Sexton Blake, for instance, who is still going strong. He first came to life about a quarter of a century ago, and at a rough estimate I should say that his doings have run to something over five million words. This, of course, has not been the work of one pen but of several.

But I am wandering from my subject. What I wish to point out is that a school serial is to some extent a study of character. I do not mean that the writer should spend much time and space in actually describing his heroes or villains, for that is a mistake in any sort of fiction. But in a school

story there are usually a good many characters, and these must be made to contrast with one another as strongly and clearly as possible. You have your hero, your villain, your namby-pamby boy, your cheery, laughing lad, your sneak, and your dandy, and all these must be kept clear-cut and separate.

By contrast, in the ordinary adventure story you have as a rule two boys only. They may have a man with them such as an Indian scout, a big good-natured negro, or perhaps an old prospector. If the story deals with the sea it may be necessary to bring in several of the crew, but on the whole the number of characters dealt with in an adventure yarn is much smaller than in a school story. It is best to have two boys, for then they can talk, and it is a great deal easier to let a story tell itself in this way than to describe the doings of one boy.

Yet, oddly enough, my own most successful story related the doings of one boy only. I say most successful because, though first published in book form in 1920, it is still selling. This story, *Martin Crusoe*, was originally serialised in the *Children's Newspaper*, and afterwards published in book form by Messrs. G. G. Harrap.

The hero is an English boy who has been trained to fly, and who is also a wireless expert. He gets a mysterious message from an island in the Sargasso, and while he is puzzling over this, word comes that his father has died suddenly in America and that a great land scheme he was financing has gone to smash leaving hundreds ruined. With the idea of raising money and clearing his dead father's name, Martin starts for the unknown island, which he finds to be a volcanic peak inhabited by a strange old hermit who has originally reached the place in a submarine and lives alone in a vast cave sumptuously furnished. The hermit tells Martin of another much larger island in the weed, inhabited by the survivors of a long extinct race, who are governed by the Golden Giants, these being descendants of Norsemen who, centuries ago, had broken through the weed in a long ship.

The Giants invade the volcano island but are driven off. One, however, is left, Akon by name, badly hurt. He recovers and Martin learns from him of the civil war raging in his own island between the Norsemen and the hordes of the older folk led by the traitor Odan. Akon himself is the king's son. Martin decides to take Akon back to his own island, and does so in his flying-boat, the Bat.

It is easy to see what scope this offers for adventure of the wildest type. Akon, huge, splendid, rather stupid but intensely honest, is a good foil for Martin's quick cleverness. Hymer, the cunning old priest of the Sun, becomes their ally, and these and a few others, with the aid of Martin's twentieth-century knowledge, defeat the great conspiracy.

There is one great beauty about an invented island. You can people it as you please, you can bring in any sort of monsters such as plesiosaurs and pterodactyls. The only thing to remember is that if you use this kind of thing it must always be in close contact with aeroplanes, bombs, wireless and other resources of modern civilisation. The modern boy is just as keen on adventure with a big "A" as his father was before him, but he will have the contrast. That, in brief, is the secret of successful writing for the youth of to-day. But the writer must also remember this: if he is going to write about an aeroplane he must first know something about an aeroplane. I went up first as early as 1913 in order to be sure of my colour. The same with wireless, motor-cars, turbines. The details must be correct, for if they are not, letters will soon pile up on the editorial desk, pointing out with remorseless accuracy exactly where the author has gone astray.

JOHN CHANCELLOR

*(Mr. John Chancellor is one of the most popular newspaper serial writers. The three synopses which we print below are characteristic of his successful serial work.)*

Half the battle of selling your serial story to the editor

is won if you start off with what might be termed "a fool-proof situation," that is to say, a situation at once novel and arresting—without necessarily being bizarre—which suggests so many possibilities and ramifications that the editor can see at a glance that even the biggest fool of a writer could not fail to make a readable yarn out of it.

### "INFIDELITY"

(Published in the "*Sunday Chronicle*," 1925)

The heroine, the wife of a successful K.C. and politician, is ideally happy. There is not a cloud on her horizon. Her husband seems to be devoted to her, and they have plenty of money and no troubles of any sort.

The husband is taken ill with influenza. He becomes delirious, and, mistaking his wife for the doctor, he says to her. "I think I'm going to die, Doctor, and I want your advice. I've been living with another woman for two years, and my wife doesn't know anything about it. But it will come out if I die. Do you think I ought to tell her?"

This is like a bombshell in the heroine's life; she has never had the slightest suspicion of such a thing. She is beside herself, and does not know what to do. She is passionately in love with her husband, and cannot bear the thought of giving him up. She decides to say nothing to him. When he recovers he has no idea that he has given himself away during his delirium.

The situation is brought to a head when the husband of the hero's mistress—a ne'er-do-weel—threatens to bring proceedings for divorce against his wife unless the hero promises to suppress evidence in a certain lawsuit in which he has been briefed by the Public Prosecutor.

A divorce scandal might ruin the hero politically, but he refuses to submit to blackmail. In his darkest hour he finds that his wife knows the truth and loves him well enough

to stand by him. They fight side by side against his former mistress—who, passionate and revengeful, wants to ruin him now that she cannot win him—and the ne'er-do-weel husband, who will in turn be threatened with ruin if the Public Prosecutor wins his case.

### 'THE MYSTERY OF NORMAN'S COURT'

*(Published in serial form in the "Daily Sketch," 1923; in serial form in Canada and Australia, 1924; in book form by Hutchinson's, London, 1924; in book form by Small Maynard, Boston, U.S.A., 1924; translated into Danish and Czechoslovakian, 1925-1926.)*

David Forrester is summoned from Cairo by a mysterious telegram from his former sweetheart, Helen Jefferson, who lives with her father, a retired Anglo-Egyptian banker, in the latter's house, Norman's Court, Sussex.

When he arrives he finds a small house-party assembled. Amongst the guests is Hugh Bowden, who at one time acted as the banker's jackal in many shady transactions.

Helen Jefferson tells Forrester that she has summoned him because she feels that some awful danger is threatening her father, who refuses, however, to tell her anything, and laughs at her fears. Forrester discovers that Helen knows nothing of her father's past.

At dinner that night Bowden, who is, apparently, hated by nearly every member of the house-party, excuses himself and says that he wants to go upstairs to bed, as he has to travel to Paris early next morning.

When morning arrives he is found murdered in a locked room, and it is discovered in the course of the police inquiry that almost everybody in the house had an excellent reason for killing him, and that three people even threatened to do so.

As the story moves on from this situation each character

begins to suspect all the others, and an atmosphere of hatred, suspicion and fear is worked up gradually to the *dénouement*.

The mystery of how the crime was committed inside the locked room is, of course, the background against which all this moves, but it is not the essential theme of the story. The essential theme is the emotional reaction of the various characters shut up together in a house where every one is suspect.

Eventually the murderer—naturally, the least likely of all the characters—is discovered and the mystery of the locked room made clear

#### 'THE LADDER OF CARDS'

(Published in the "Daily Sketch," 1926, in "Flynn's Magazine" New York, 1926 published in book form by Hutchinson's, London 1926; translated into Czecho-Slovakian 1927.)

The hero, a young solicitor on holiday, engages a room at the Parthenon Hotel London. In the lounge he sees a beautiful American girl and a man who is apparently her father. He learns that these two and a third man, a Mexican doctor, have engaged the suite next door to his room.

He is so attracted by the girl that when he gets to his room he listens at the dividing door in the hope of hearing her voice. Instead, he overhears the man whom he thinks is the girl's father—Octavius Knight, an American financier—making arrangements for a big deal in oil. The hero, ashamed of himself for eavesdropping, tries to move out of earshot, but finds that he has overturned a heavy vase, which is now leaning against the door in such a way that if he steps back it will go down with a crash.

He remains listening, and from Knight's conversation learns that the value of Hartacre Oil is going to leap up on

the next day. The hero puts all his money into this oil, and makes a fortune.

But he has not seen the girl again. Anxious to do so, he waits till Knight has gone out then knocks at the door of the suite and enters.

He finds the girl handcuffed to a settee. She will not give him an explanation, nor allow him to free her. She promises, however, that if she should be in danger she will make a certain signal on the dividing door.

On the next day the hero learns that the girl is dead. Furious miserable certain that Knight has killed her he accuses the financier of the crime. Knight, however, with the testimony of the Mexican doctor and the hotel manager, proves that the girl has been mentally deranged and that her death had been expected for weeks.

The coffin is still in the suite but the financier and the doctor have moved to another suite opposite. That night the hero gets the key of the dividing door enters the death-chamber and sees the girl lying dead.

He returns to his room and in the early hours of the morning hears someone knocking out the arranged danger signal on the dividing door.

That is the opening situation. Alarms excursions and complications carry along the story to the *dénouement* and happy ending.

#### MAY CHRISTIE

*(May Christie's serials are popular with readers all over the world. "The Gilded Rose," "Garden of Desire," "The Disturbing Kiss," "The Girl Who Dared," and "Hearts Afire" have all been successful in book form.)*

"What constitutes the successful serial writer?" is a question that the successful serial writer is continually



being asked. In other words, what qualities of mind and character are essential for this highly specialised and special form of work?

I am astounded that so many persons should imagine serial writing to be easy. "What a story I could write, if only I had *the time* to get down to it!" or, "I could write a marvellous serial about my own life if I *only* took the trouble!" Don't we often hear that kind of thing?

And the real truth is that serial writing is a complicated business with a hundred twists and turns and lights and shades, demanding endless tricks of the pen (I ought to say typewriter) in order to "keep up the reader's interest"—and believe me, the reader's interest is as fragile as the veriest bubble, liable to collapse at any moment, and must be fostered tenderly by a sort of heaven-sent, inborn *knack* you can't teach anybody, but is part and parcel of the successful serial writer's natural equipment.

The highly successful serial writer, then, is born not made—in my opinion.

The first essential to my mind, is *Sympathy*. The wider you are in your sympathies, and the more tolerant and understanding of human nature the better serial writer you will be.

Secondly, you must boast a truly terrific *flow of words*. "Gift of the gab," as we say in Scotland. The rush of Niagara over its high precipice is as nothing to the torrential stream that issues from the pen of your successful serial writer.

*Imagination* must have as high a voltage also. And that reminds me of the rebuke I once received which led me to become a serial story writer. It was in college days, while studying for my Master of Arts degree that Sir Richard Lodge (my History Professor) blue-pencilled on my examination papers: "Most amusing. But kindly remember that Imagination cannot take the place of Knowledge in these papers!"

I graduated took those words to heart, and chained that high-powered imagination on to serial story writing

Knowledge of life is an essential, too. No serial story writer ever was a recluse.

That takes us to travel. In the comparatively short period of years in which I have been serial writing I have turned out a score of serials and journeyed to Australia and back, twelve trips across the Atlantic Ocean Egypt. South Africa, Monte Carlo and New York.

That helps to give the necessary broadening of mind, the "local colour" also. *The Garden of Desire* (which in this country ran serially in the *Daily Sketch*) had an African setting, while *The Girl Who Dared* (which appeared in the *Daily Mirror*) journeyed from London to New York, Carolina Florida and Cuba.

To be a successful serial writer one must cultivate stick-at-it-iveness. Oh! those million words that must be written! You must learn to write in all and every circumstance—in the coal-hole if no other retreat comes handy. One of my most successful serials in the *Daily Mirror* was dictated between paroxysms on the high Atlantic to the only passenger who could run a typewriter and who wasn't seasick! The story had already started in the paper, and though I really prayed that ship would hit the bottom of the ocean while I lived I had to get the instalments out "on time."

Beyond stick-at-it-iveness the Romantic Heart and the couleur-de-rose viewpoint are essential, to my mind. "L'Amour, c'est tout."

And in the last analysis, I'd say the trick of the successful serial writer can't be defined; it is a sort of heaven-born charm or magnetism—is a "something" ingrained in the heart and the imagination which inevitably will bring success.

Here is a brief synopsis of one of my stories which was published in the *Daily Mirror*.

## "THE GIRL WHO DARED"

Mary Forrest, typist, gets a chance to go as travelling secretary to America with one Cyrus Wade, novelist. In the opening chapter she has a romantic meeting with a brown-eyed stranger. He turns up on the Atlantic liner on which Cyrus Wade and his party are journeying to New York. Unfortunately for Mary, the brown-eyed stranger is already in love with Cyrus Wade's beautiful American niece who is aboard.

When news comes by the ship's wireless that this "hero"—Philip Andover—who is going to Cuba to inherit a property left by his elder brother, is penniless, and not the heir after all the novelist's niece, Luella Loder, throws him over. In New York he turns to Mary Forrest, the ever-sympathetic. Luella flirts with a rich Australian. Philip's supposed sister-in-law (the mother of the heir) has arrived in New York with her little boy, *en route* to Cuba to take over the property on behalf of her child. She is an impostor. Her child is the child of a second marriage, and not the child of her first marriage which had been to Philip's elder brother.

Mary Forrest has romantic adventures in New York. She goes with her employer and his wife to Carolina, then to Florida, then to the Bahama Islands, Philip being *sur le tapis* most of the time. In Cuba, Luella turns up to make trouble. Also her rich Australian suitor (who has a wife already). Complications increase. Mary discovers that Philip's sister-in-law is lying, and that the little boy who is the supposed heir to the property is really the bailiff's son and the son of this woman (by a second marriage). After a painful scene with this woman, who almost blinds Luella with vitriol, Philip inherits the property and marries Mary, while Luella (who recovers from her accident) marries the Australian, his wife having conveniently died meantime. All ends to the tune of wedding bells.

## MAY EDGINTON

*(Distinguished as dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, journalist, and as a film author, May Edginton has also won international success as a writer of serials.)*

Serial writing is a business. There are a few novelists of the front rank whose best work is published serially, either because of their celebrated names and the successes of their books, or because they manage so to combine book form and serial form work as to hold the interest of magazine readers from instalment to instalment. I would give, as outstanding examples, Robert Hichens, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Somerset Maugham, and Rupert Hughes.

But on the whole a good, tense serial does not make a front rank novel. On the other hand, it frequently makes a fine film.

There are several excellent serial writers who will probably never make really first-class novelists. Their brains work differently; they see their plots and characters swiftly, dramatically, pictorially, and have not the patience—nor, probably, the special ability—to develop a theme slowly into a thoughtful and academically perfect novel.

The best novels seldom make good films—though high prices are paid for the film rights of a successful book. These prices are usually paid for the success and not for the material.

However, I am, here, writing of serials *qua* serials, and not of books worthy of a library shelf.

The writer who feels that his medium is the serial has more scope and more profit to-day than he ever had before. The newspapers are raising their standard, and the English magazines, noting no doubt the policy of the American magazines, are returning to the serial which for a while they seemed to be neglecting.

I do not propose here to explain the technicalities of

separate sales of British rights, American rights, first and second rights, and all the other rights. Nor will I here enter upon an explanation of the desirability of simultaneous publication in England and America, nor of copyright. These are details which every serial writer—who is writing for his living—should learn for himself at the outset. In any case, his literary agent will have them at his fingers' ends.

I propose, however, to suggest that, in the hugely extended market of to-day, it is wise for such a writer, when planning his serial, to consider all these rights and tastes ; to think of the American public as well as his public at home in England ; of the film fan as well as of his editors.

Writers are still too light-minded in their business dealings. " I have a commission to write a serial for the *Daily Mail*," says the writer thankfully, and down he sits to do it.

Seldom does it occur to him, when planning, to try to please the *Saturday Evening Post*, or *Collier's Weekly*, or some other American publication with the same piece of work. He looks as far as the end of his nose, and there he sees the *Daily Mail*, and that ends it.

I have been asked for the purposes of this discourse to give here a synopsis of one of my own serials. Here is a short synopsis of a short serial.

Lady A, a beautiful vamp, who hates her fat elderly husband, so works on the feelings of an ardent boy who is staying in their country house that the boy, thinking he is ridding an angel of a brute, kills the husband.

Lady A is horrified ; for as she has refused to have a child, there is no heir, the money and the estate will pass to a distant relation, and she is left with a pittance.

Nothing was further from her thoughts than to influence anyone to murder her husband. She only thought it would be amusing to make the attractive boy make love to her

Staying in the house, too, is a hard, fine type of man,

with whom she has been secretly in love, but who will never make advances to her. He was the boy's guardian until the latter came of age, and is fond of him.

In the house also is a hard-up girl, who loves the boy.

At the trial, the boy, well defended, is let off with a "manslaughter" sentence.

The hard, fine man forces Lady A to keep up her rôle of injured angel to the boy under threat of exposing her to society, so that the boy will not have the torture of knowing that he killed in vain.

He—the hard, fine man—then makes Lady A marry him (and live in poverty on his penurious country estate) because he feels that when the boy comes out of prison, a rich man, she will marry and destroy him.

Here we have the situation of husband and wife living coldly under the same roof, the wife madly in love with the husband who despises her.

Ultimately the story works out to the reconciliation of Lady A and her new husband and the union of the boy and girl.

This is a very, very bald synopsis.

Is this a good serial to write, from the author's point of view?

Serially, it was a dangerous story to write. Editors are afraid of shocking their readers. However, I was content to write it, and to sell it, not very advantageously, to English and American magazines for one reason.

I knew I had a cast-iron film plot. The film is being made by an Italian director for a Continental firm. I had, of course, American and English film offers for it, in fact, for this story there was great competition. But I sold it to Continental people because I wanted to see it directed by a Latin temperament.

In writing the above serial I decided that it was of no use to compromise, no use to de-sex it, or in any way to "play down" to the fears of editors.

The author needs to be able to make these judgments if he is to succeed either artistically or commercially.

I am going now to write a little about those words "artistically" and "commercially." *Do not despise your public.* Perhaps this is the most important rule of all.

Writers still affect a "highbrow" attitude, even if they are exclusively engaged on what they pretend to belittle as "lowbrow" stuff.

Personally, I write as I do *because I can write no better.* I would like to write like a Galsworthy or a Maugham, but I can't. What I do is all I can do. I am not misunderstood; I am not suffering in my soul nor sullyng my art when I write a serial such as the one I have just synopsised. I am paid as much as I am worth and appreciated as much as I deserve.

This is true of all other writers. If a writer does not turn out a great book, it is because he can't. I feel like Iris in *The Green Hat*, in that "I hate these despisers."

Some years ago I heard a quite well-known and highbrow writer address a meeting at a literary club. He spoke with refined scorn about "the disgrace of appearing in the *Strand Magazine*." Those were his words, which sank well into my memory. Well I knew where he would like to be—in the *Strand Magazine*, with regularity and profit. I expect the *Strand Magazine* can do nicely without him.

If you are writing a serial for the *Housemaids' Weekly*, don't despise the housemaids. Their lives are as full of comedy, of love of hate, of murky tragedies as you will find anywhere else.

Remember Elsie in *Riceyman Steps*.

## J. JEFFERSON FARJEON

*(As a writer of "crook" and mystery stories Mr. Farjeon is pre-eminently successful; he is also well known as playwright and humorist. Has contributed serials to the "Daily News," "Star," "Daily Mirror," "Daily Chronicle," etc., etc. We are happy to print the views of so versatile an exponent of the craft of the serial.)*

Synopses are deceptive things. and if I were an editor I doubt whether I should pay much attention to them. The man who can turn out a good synopsis is not necessarily the man who can turn the synopsis into a good story. On the other hand, an unilluminating synopsis may prove the basis of a first-class serial. I believe there are many writers of popular yarns whose novels, when reduced to mere synopsis form, would appear quite indistinctive and often even ridiculous in the extreme.

Take the average Edgar Wallace story, for example. If Mr. Wallace undressed it revealed its skeleton on two or three typewritten pages, and submitted it under a pseudonym, it would probably be returned with thanks. Or take a work by Joseph Conrad. No synopsis could possibly reveal any glimpse of the finished result—either from an artistic or a commercial standpoint.

I have only once submitted a story in detailed synopsis form—and I know I never will again. It was the synopsis of my second mystery story, *Uninvited Guests*, and if I remember rightly it covered twenty closely-written sheets. That would be between seven and eight thousand words. Every chapter, from Chapter I to XLII, was scrupulously described, and every situation worked out to the final detail. And when eventually I came to write the story for the *Daily Graphic*, my free imagination was caged by the rigidly preordained scheme I had worked out. The story was successful, but it was written entirely without the spirit of adventure. I



knew everything that was coming, and allowed nothing for impulses and inspirations of the moment.

After that I changed my method. I realised that it took considerably less time, while also providing a far better index to what would follow, to use those seven thousand words in the form of the first chapter or two, with a brief noncommittal synopsis at the end. *The Crooks' Shadow*, which appeared in the *Star* and is just out in novel form, was commissioned before the serial editor of the *Star* knew who the "Crooks' Shadow" was. He rang me up and expounded a theory which proved (to my delight) to be wrong. Now, had my brief synopsis revealed to him the identity of the "Shadow," the story would probably have appeared in the *Star* just the same, but a certain interest would have been eliminated from the minds of those who considered the story.

Here is a brief synopsis of *The Crooks' Shadow*. I did not work from any more elaborate notes.

The "Crooks' Shadow" is a mysterious, elusive character who is in the unusual position of being "wanted" by both the police and the criminal world. The identity of the "Shadow" is not revealed till the end of the story, and the method by which the "Shadow" works is to discover projects which other crooks set on foot, to nip in at the last moment and, profiting by their arrangements, to carry off the prize. Thus, he is a pest to both crooks and detectives, and a noted detective and a noted crook have an unofficial truce while they join in attempting to discover the elusive, mysterious genius. It is a triangular contest, in which the detectives and the crooks can summon all their aid, while the "Shadow" works silently and alone. A strong love interest is woven into the story.

(The love interest, of course, may be taken for granted; but it is just as well to mention it!)

*The Green Dragon* was not written from any synopsis at all. It was designed first as a play, but before I wrote the play I got the novel commissioned by the *Daily Chronicle*,

and I worked merely upon a scenario—from which I ruthlessly departed. As a matter of fact, when I eventually wrote the play, I scrapped the original scenario altogether and wrote it from the book.

It is naturally impossible to lay down any law, and each writer must work according to his own fashion. Some love the neat, careful, tidy style—these have generally insured their lives—and follow the plan I followed with *Uninvited Guests* of mapping every detail of their story out beforehand. But others, myself now included, prefer to keep alive the spirit of adventure while actually at work, and do not like to know *all* the scenery on the road that will be travelled *via* the pen or typewriter. Delightful things can happen at 3.30 on Friday which could never have happened out of one's mood at 10.45 on the previous Monday. It is to allow for these pleasant things that one avoids the too-rigid synopsis, if it can reasonably be avoided.

I believe this plan, too, dovetails best into editorial requirements. Submit to your editor eight thousand well-written words, with a brief outline on a single sheet of the general idea and character of the story, and nothing more is likely to be required. That is, if you have already made some little headway in the realms of serial literature. If you are an absolute novice, of course, the editor will probably want to read more than eight thousand words before granting a commission; but your form of approach will have been the best, the most workable, and that involving the least expenditure of time on your and the editor's part.

In regard to the style of the story, that of course is not for any outsider to decide, but four points which guide me may also help to guide others. I try to find a plot that will interest me as well as my readers. I try to put that plot into an atmosphere that I find personally intriguing. I try to invent at least one character who is "worth while," and who may perhaps serve to cover up other commonplaces which the story contains. (For I make no claims to genius.) And,

lastly, I try to fall in love with my heroine. This is sometimes difficult, but I firmly believe it is essential !

### SYDNEY HORLER

(*Sydney Horler has written serials for the "News of the World"—to which he is a regular contributor—the "People," "Cassell's Magazine," the "Daily Chronicle," "New York Sunday American," etc. He has one of the biggest serial-reading publics of any living writer, and his reputation as a sensational novelist is steadily growing.*)

The synopsis of the serial, *Phantoms of the Night*, a *People* serial (which will be published in novel form under the title of *In the Dark*), is as follows :

Martin Creighton, the hero, having been swindled out of a fortune, being at the end of his resources, and having pawned everything else, advertised his—life. This is the advertisement he inserted in the Personal Column of the *Morning Meteor* :

Old Public School Boy (27) wishes to sell his life—  
£5,000. Desperate, healthy, adaptable.—Box N. 4197  
or Museum 10000.

Receiving no letters in reply, he waited in his small service flat for a possible telephone message. Just as he was abandoning all hope that anyone could be interested in such a bizarre announcement—the telephone rang !

He went to the instrument, took off the receiver and heard a girl's voice crying : " Help ! Oh—h—— ! "

The appeal rang in his ears like the despairing cry of one utterly lost. The last word had been cut off as though a hand had been placed suddenly over the speaker's mouth.

Creighton found his own voice.

"Hello . . . hello . . . Who are you?"

He was answered in a suave, cultured tone—a man's voice this time.

After inquiring if Creighton was the advertiser in the *Morning Meteor* that morning, this unknown says he would like to meet him. He makes an appointment with Creighton at a well-known West-end restaurant. Creighton, keeping this appointment, makes the acquaintance of a huge man, whom he mentally calls the Colossus, and an exotically beautiful girl who is this strange man's companion. Both refuse to tell Creighton their real names.

Now for the plot. The Colossus' real name is Juhl. He is an international crook, the chief lieutenant of a master criminal known as The King, whose identity remains a mystery until the end of the story.

The King is a super-blackmailer. He has organised a gigantic plot from which even Cabinet Ministers are not exempt. One famous politician commits suicide as a result, and another is forced to resign.

Juhl, his chief-of-staff, is always on the look-out for educated men who are down and out and desperate. He offers to buy Martin Creighton's life because he wishes Creighton to be a catspaw in a future murder.

Creighton is actually charged with this murder, but manages to effect a desperate escape from the police. In doing so his fate becomes linked up again with that of Margery Steers, the girl whose appeal for help he had heard over the telephone.

Margery, a private secretary employed by Lord Belshaven, the Foreign Secretary, is also in the power of Juhl because, through The King, he has information that her father, an official employed in the Treasury, has been embezzling Government funds.

A character who plays a very important part in the story is Bunny Chipstead, a wealthy free-lance Secret Service man. Being interested in such little bizarreries, Chipstead had

clipped Creighton's advertisement from the *Meteor* and had endeavoured to find out what was at the back of it. He discovered an amazing plot in the course of time.

From London the scene changes to a lonely derelict castle on the Kentish coast. Zoab, a former creature of Juhl's—a hideous dwarf, but a highly skilled bacteriologist—has fallen in love with the captive Margery and has taken her down to Wildwood Castle. Having quarrelled with Juhl over money, he transfers his services to an unholy combination of financiers under whose directions he is cultivating the bacilli of a new and terrible disease which, when disseminated, is destined to throw the world into such confusion that the trinity of foreign Jews—Schriner, Zundt, and Wilowski—will be able to corner the world's markets.

Through the united efforts of Creighton and Chipstead, each working independently, this ghastly danger is averted; Juhl is arrested and the identity of *The King* disclosed.

"*The King*" is found to be Mr. Jarvis Stark, the Deputy Commissioner of Scotland Yard. In his official post Stark was entrusted with many important secrets—personal as well as national—and these he handed on to Juhl for the latter to turn to profitable account. Stark, upon medical examination, is found to be mad.

Needless to say, the lovers, Creighton and Margery Steers, are married, Bunny Chipstead being best man. Zoab commits suicide, and Xavia, the exotically beautiful female crook, colleague of Juhl, disappears, because I didn't know what in the deuce to do with her. But no doubt she will be useful for another story.

Sydney Horler writes: The above is a typical plot of mine. By typical, I mean, of course, that it is characteristic of my work. I deal in sensation, heavily tinged with romance, and decorated now and then with a little humour. It is proving an exceptionally good "line." Clergymen and maiden aunts are amongst my most enthusiastic readers, which, judging from my correspondence, include all classes

of the community. Romance and The Thrill : it's a splendid suit !

My first endeavour when planning a serial is to evolve an idea which, if I am lucky, is both startling and original. Instance : a man down and out advertising his life. Using this idea as a pivot, I build the rest of the story round it. Given a good start, it is not difficult.

Having got my opening idea, I next try to evolve some interesting characters. These must be of such a type that they will " fit in " more or less with the nature of the story. My own pet characters are tremendous villains (I endeavour to prevent them being too blatant), exotic villainesses, charming English girls as heroines ; plus-four wearing, pipe-smoking, breezily-cursing, athletic young men as heroes with a Secret Service agent always hovering in the background. He's my trump card, that Secret Service man. My scenes " sets " are lonely houses, ancient castles, seashore, fashionable restaurants, gambling halls, underworld cellars. These " trappings," although they have been used time and again (what sensational novelist can indeed do without them ?), will always have an irresistible appeal to the average reader unless he or she be a highbrow—and what popular writer cares a snap of the fingers for highbrows, anyway ? The success of the story depends, naturally, upon the craftsmanship shown in dealing with these ingredients.

It is a fascinating pastime inventing characters to fit plots, and it is remarkable how they evolve in the mind. Once I have my full set of characters, the story, to me, is half written. I have discovered this from practical experience : if your characters are sufficiently interesting (*i.e.*, whimsical, villainous, sympathetic, appealing, etc.) they will take control of the story through their actions and practically write the thing themselves.

It should never be forgotten that in work such as mine Action is all-important. There must be no dawdling : I like to start off with a crash and to keep the ball rolling

## HOW TO WRITE SERIAL FICTION

all the way through. Hence my publisher's slogan: "Horler for excitement!" Consequently, I endeavour to keep my characters always "doing something."

And here are two other very important factors—romance (i.e., strong love interest) and humour are essential, in my opinion, to a really successful adventure-mystery story. —both are necessary to relieve the tensely of the dramatic heritions. Take the successful stage writers—they all the saving element of humour.

My advice to all ambitious serial writers is to get a speciality and then stick to it like glue. Get known for a certain reliable brand of fiction and the commissions will come along, cover fear. There are thousands of writers to-day—but how many can really deliver the goods? In spite of the tremendous competition, there is more money in this thrilling game—for that is what it is—than ever before. But you must turn in the right stuff

The really successful serial writer to-day can earn his thousands of pounds a year. Apart from writing a "best-seller," there is no more profitable form of fiction. This should be remembered.

What follows now is so trite as to be "tripe," but don't be discouraged by the fact that some editors will strongly dislike your material. The more personality and individuality a writer possesses the more his work will be disliked in certain quarters. I personally have had one editor say to me: "I'm sorry, but I don't like your work, Horler." Within half an hour I have sold that same serial for £400 in Fleet Street—and obtained an even bigger price for it in America. It's as true in fiction as in life that what is one man's meat is another man's poison. And half the interest would go out of existence if you could please everyone. It would to me, anyway.

One last remark and I have done. It is a most encouraging sign for the serial writer that newspapers and magazines (newspapers particularly) are publishing better and better

work as serials. There was a time, and not many years ago either, when the average newspaper serial was a rubbishy article. Now many novelists sell newspaper editors the right to serialise their work before it appears between book covers. The last eight serials I have written have all been published subsequently as novels both here and in America.

### JOHN HUNTER

*(Believing that a fully detailed synopsis would be of special interest to those readers who prefer to work on this basis, we invited Mr. John Hunter, who needs no introduction to the serial public, to give us the following summary of his story, "The Drums of Death.")*

This story deals with the French Revolution during the months prior to and immediately following on the execution of Louis XVI, and in its construction aims at giving not only that essential of a serial story, a good first instalment, but also a subsequent rapid march of events which would tend to increase the interest as the story develops.

*Synopsis.* Henri, Marquis de Boigny, accuses Captain Nicholas Venture, a broken King's officer, and a notoriously skilful swordsman, of cheating at cards at Gordon's gaming house in the Strand. The subsequent quarrel is viewed with interest by a discreet little man in black, who stands back against the wall and takes no active part in the affair.

Venture demands satisfaction of de Boigny, but the French aristocrat, with the insolence of his kind, declares that Venture presumes in imagining that he would meet him, and leaves the place.

Venture, his path barred by de Boigny's men-servants, feeling himself utterly humiliated, with his shameful position in society now made very clear to his own sight, declares that he will find de Boigny and kill him. When the Marquis has



gone he leaves the gaming house and walks down towards the river alone.

He is overtaken by the little man in black, who invites him in an intriguingly mysterious fashion to accompany him to a certain house. Venture goes in a coach the man in black has at his disposal.

Venture is taken to a large and imposing residence, the entrance hall of which is dim and quiet. Through large closed doors, guarded by lackeys, however, he hears the strains of dance music.

In a little room off the hall he encounters Mr. Pitt, Prime Minister of England, and after a great deal of argument and talk a certain mission is made clear to him.

Louis of France at that moment lies in the Prison of the Temple in Paris awaiting the sentence of the Convention, which tried him a few days previous and found him guilty. There is a Royalist movement to set him free, and among the leaders of this movement are de Boigny, who has come to London expressly to seek the aid of Mr. Pitt. Pitt maintains spies in Paris, and it has seemed to him that a daring and resolute agent of his own might be of service in the ranks of the Royalist conspirators. His man in black has asserted that he knows such a man, and has produced Venture. Venture gathers that alternating to the plot to save the King is yet another plot, details of which will be supplied him by the conspirators themselves. Should he succeed in carrying out their instructions to the letter, and serve Mr. Pitt faithfully, his reward will be the restoration of his commission and a sufficient sum of money to enable him to maintain it.

The offer emphasises to Venture all that his disgrace meant to him. He knows that if only he can regain his old status his assumption of raffish carelessness will drop from him like a cloak. He is hungry for that commission. He accepts the work.

Before he leaves the house he encounters, under humiliating circumstances for himself, a proud and beautiful girl. When

he gets outside the man in black tells him that the girl is Valerie de Boigny, the sister of the Marquis. Her words of contempt still burn in Venture's ears. He feels that he hates both brother and sister with equal intensity.

Venture lands at Havre and travels on the Caen diligence which halts for a space in the darkness at a wayside inn. Also halted at that inn are Valerie de Boigny and her maid, Therese travelling by chaise to the Chateau de Boigny near Caen, whither Venture is bound.

A bully insults Valerie, and Venture watches with some sardonic satisfaction to see if her proud and contemptuous manner will avail her in face of the bully's drunken advances. But the man inadvertently knocks over Venture's wine and Venture assails him with his tongue.

The bully, claiming to be the finest swordsman in Paris, threatens to kill Venture, and he is encouraged in this by a hideous dwarf who was drinking with him.

They fight, and Venture slays the swordsman, afterwards baulking, in no uncertain fashion, the treacherous assault of the dwarf. When he leaves the inn the dwarf threatens vengeance against him, proclaiming that he is none other than the dreaded Friend of the People, Jean Paul Marat.

The following morning Valerie and her brother are talking together in the Chateau de Boigny, and Valerie, having told of the ease with which Venture slew the swordsman at the inn, expresses the fear that her brother's life will be forfeit when the two meet, for she knows that de Boigny is no match for Venture. At the same time she tries to persuade de Boigny to abandon his schemes for the rescue of Louis and to emigrate to England while there is yet time.

But de Boigny will not hear of this. The previous night he had interviewed Danton in the chateau, and the demagogue, having emphasised his famous offer to save the life of Louis for forty thousand English pounds, accused de Boigny of wasting time and returned to Paris in a rage. De Boigny now proposes to follow Danton to Paris and make one last

effort. He will travel alone on horseback. Valerie will follow by coach, and will go to the house of an old friend, Madame du Chanier, near the Palais Royal.

After de Boigny's departure preparations are made for Valerie's journey. She is to be accompanied by Therese and by the remaining two serving-men. All the rest have left. Her chaise is at the door when Venture arrives and demands to see de Boigny, his mission for Mr. Pitt temporarily forgotten in his hatred of the Marquis and his desire for immediate vengeance. Outwitted by Valerie, he is captured by the two serving-men, and Valerie tells him she intends to hold him until her brother has a sufficiently long start to enable him to reach Paris in safety.

With Venture locked up in a tiny room at the top of the distant and empty west wing of the chateau, Valerie sets off for Paris, but on the road encounters Marat with an armed escort, and he forces her to return. By this time it is late afternoon.

Marat is tyrannical, filled with malicious hatred for everything that represents the old régime. His presence in the district gradually is explained to Valerie, and the explanation fills her with terror. Marat has suspected Danton, has vaguely guessed at Danton's journey to see her brother. Marat asks for the Marquis.

Confused, unable, through terror, to view the situation logically, wishful to ensure once more that her brother at least reaches Paris in safety, Valerie says he is out. Marat announces that he will wait for him to return. The time passes

The two serving-men are in the hands of Marat's people. Valerie stands alone. She knows that when Marat has waited long enough there will be dreadful trouble. In her desperation, seeking a way out of the *impasse*, she remembers the desperate and dangerous man locked up in the west wing, and she makes an excuse which enables her to reach Venture's room unobserved.

Venture is scornful when she appeals to him. He hates her. And then a dreadful temptation presents itself to her. She regards her brother as all that is noble and generous. Venture is a common gamester, a rough-tongued swordsman who can sneer at a woman in distress. She says to him that her brother has gone to Paris. How better could he further his own desire for vengeance than by coming to Paris with her—by assisting her to escape from Marat? She holds a safe conduct for herself, her maid, and two serving-men. If only one serving-man travels, that will not matter.

And all the time she knows that when they reach Paris, rather than permit Venture to track down and slay her brother, she will denounce him as a spy to the Convention.

Venture, after some exciting incidents, saves her, and they get clear away on the road to Paris.

While they are travelling Henri de Boigny is in Paris plotting the rescue of Louis with de Batz and his associates, and during that time Louis Antoine de St. Just calls on de Boigny and intimates that France stands in peril on her frontiers and needs the services of a clever soldier. De Boigny is such, and St. Just offers him a high position in the Republican Army. De Boigny refuses the offer.

*En route* to Paris Valerie finds herself strangely drawn towards Venture. The proximity engendered of the journey enables her to learn that this man is something more than a swashbuckling ruffian, and that his bitterness is largely the product of his circumstances. By a daring and resourceful trick he saves them from great danger, and Valerie feels very real gratitude towards him. Yet when she endeavours to express that gratitude he repulses her. She feels both angry and, curiously enough, hurt. In due course he delivers her to the house of Madame du Chanier in Paris and parts from her.

He goes to the house of a man calling himself Jules Bottier. Bottier is one of Pitt's agents. Bottier is going home. Venture is taking his place. From Bottier, Venture learns something of that second scheme at which Pitt hinted. It is that

de Boigny and his associates, if they fail to save Louis, have a great plan for the rescue of Marie Antoinette.

Meantime Henri de Boigny has come to Madame du Chancier's house and has met Valerie. When he hears of her encounter with Marat he decides that it will be unwise for her to remain where she is, in case Marat has extracted from either of their two men servants her address in Paris. So he takes her to the house of a Madame Massonier, in the Rue Clautan. She tells him how Venture brought her through safely, and how he left her at the door without telling her where he intended to go in Paris.

After an unsuccessful attempt at rescue by de Boigny and his friends, including de Batz (an historical fact), Louis is beheaded, and Valerie hears the drums of death rolling.

The would-be rescuers of Louis are split up and hunted, and among them is de Boigny. After several escapes, wounded in the arm, with night come down on the city, de Boigny, desperate, hunted, and in imminent danger of capture, remembers Bottier, Pitt's agent. He manages to reach Bottier's residence, hotly pursued by a mob, and the man in Bottier's house saves him from the mob and gets him inside.

De Boigny recognises that he has not come to the friendly protection of Bottier, but into the hands of Venture.

Valerie waits in vain for Henri to return, and waits also for news of his capture. But no news comes, and still Henri does not appear. At last she remembers his mentioning Bottier's, and at her wit's end, she resolves to go to the English spy to see if he has news of her brother.

So she finds de Boigny in the hands of Venture, who says he is nursing him back to health so that they can settle their differences in the accepted fashion. To all her pleadings he turns a deaf ear.

When she returns to Madame Massonier she finds that good woman in an almost tearful condition. Why had not de Boigny listened to St. Just instead of pursuing this

suicidal course? He might have held a high position in the Army instead of being hunted like a beast.

Alone, Valerie reflects on this statement, and finds her former plan once more in her thoughts. On impulse, filled with anxiety to save her brother Valerie decides to go to St. Just.

She tells St. Just that her brother is badly wounded and hiding in a secret place, and she begs St. Just to leave open his offer of a post in the Army. St. Just says things have altered since he saw her brother. Besides, de Boigny is wounded and of little immediate use to him. St. Just's cold reception of her plea drives Valerie to putting into words the half-formed plan she has in her mind and from which she had previously recoiled.

She tells St. Just that her brother lies in the hands of a dangerous English spy, and that if St. Just will give his word that he will at least see that her brother is tended until he is well and able again either to accept or decline the post in the Army she will reveal the name and address of the spy. The matter is thus arranged, with the additional condition that St. Just shall send de Boigny to his chateau near Caen under escort, and that when he is well he will either accept the offer or appear before the Tribunal as a proscribed Royalist.

At this moment Marat enters. Sight of Valerie reminds him of the Englishman who, with Valerie, tricked him at Caen, and he demands that Valerie shall accompany him to the Sorbonne. He flies into one of his notorious fits of rage, and demands Valerie and the Englishman.

St. Just tells him that that matter has been arranged, and indicates that both the Englishman and de Boigny lie in the hollow of his hand. Marat demands, at least, the Englishman. St. Just, in his cold fashion, is indifferent to the fate of the spy so long as he thinks he has a chance to secure a clever soldier for the Republic. He tosses the spy to Marat.

Valerie leaves the house. The enormity of the thing she

has blundered into doing is now apparent to her. She finds herself recalling every act of service rendered her by Venture since he reached the chateau at Caen. Automatically, while she thinks these things, she is walking towards Bottier's house. She reaches the cul-de-sac, and sees a dark open doorway on its right. She slips into this doorway.

Marat's men come. Her brother is taken away to St. Just. Valerie sees Venture escape and follows him, and she takes him to Madame Massonier's house and hides him in her own bedroom, all of which leaves him wondering, for she has had no time for explanations. Her brother is brought to the house under escort, preparatory to his journey to Caen. The officer commanding the escort is named Lebrun. Lebrun is suspicious of Valerie.

Valerie has not the courage immediately to confess her part in the night's adventure, and the awkward gratitude of Venture, magnified as it is by his knowledge that he intended to kill her brother, hurts her.

Three days later de Boigny is taken to Caen under escort. Valerie goes with him, and Venture travels in disguise in place of a manservant. As none of the soldiers had ever seen him there was little risk in his doing this, particularly as he effects to be a simpleton. At Caen he receives instructions from Pitt that he is to stand by de Boigny and obey all his orders, as the nobleman still has hopes of saving the Queen. During the weeks of de Boigny's illness Venture meets secretly his little man in black, come over to France especially to see him, and this man tells him that even though the primary plan of saving the King has failed, if Venture sees the second plot through to a successful issue the promised reward shall be his.

This meeting takes place at night, and returning secretly to the chateau Venture overhears a conversation between de Boigny and a stranger. He realises that de Boigny, who has refused to give his word not to escape, is malingering, and is much better than appears. He hears little of the conversation, but one phrase comes to his ears and disturbs him.

De Boigny assures his companion that Valerie would make the greatest sacrifice for France. He wonders what that means.

Venture kills Lebrun, the officer, for insulting Valerie and takes the body into the grounds. His timely interference saved Valerie from a distressing experience, and, overcome with gratitude, she gives him her hand to kiss.

Lebrun's sergeant finds his dead officer in the morning. The sergeant, an out-and-out revolutionary, though he is acting under the orders of St. Just, favours the doctrines and behaviour of Marat. He has never been in favour of this journey to Caen, and he debits the death of Lebrun to what he terms St. Just's weakness.

He sends a letter to Marat explaining the situation, and hinting that Marat himself might care to come down with more men, or send him authority to dispose of de Boigny and his sister. One of his men rides to Paris, leaving him with only three. The sergeant, meantime, intends to reinforce his little troop with men from Caen.

Venture decides that it is time for an escape. De Boigny is fit to travel, though still malingering in order to deceive his gaolers, and the sergeant's force is insignificant. In an interview with de Boigny, in which both display some of their old bitterness, and Venture the most, he submits his proposal and reveals himself to de Boigny, saying that de Boigny will hardly have deigned to remember, but may recall him as the English cardsharp.

De Boigny is ready to leave the chateau, but he insists on going to Paris. Venture, hoping to accomplish something *en route*, is forced to agree.

The sergeant, learning their intention, has insufficient men to prevent it being carried out. He has, however, hopes of receiving instant reinforcements from Caen, and he comforts himself with the reflection that Marat and a troop will be riding from Paris and must meet the fugitives. He pretends that their escape is unobserved by him.

Before they leave the chateau de Boigny secretly tells



Valerie the details of his plot to save the Queen and her part in it.

They start for Paris. On their heels, directly his men have arrived from Caen, comes the sergeant. They are unaware of this pursuit, and he hopes to catch them between his own troop and Marat's men coming out of Paris.

But it is the 9th of July. On that afternoon Charlotte Corday has killed Marat in the Rue de l'Ecole des Medecins. The sergeant's letter reaches Paris too late. The whole of Paris is convulsed by the slaying of the Friend of the People. It has no time to think of little known English spies and insignificant Royalists.

De Boigny and his party halt for the first night at a wayside inn. Behind them is the sergeant inquiring at every estaminet and learning that they are ahead of him.

In the stable yard, with de Boigny already in his room, Valerie tells Venture that she is to be substituted for the Queen in prison in a fashion known to her brother, and that it is intended that she shall maintain the deception for just a sufficient number of hours to enable Marie Antoinette to get clear of pursuit. Of course, it will mean the guillotine for Valerie.

Venture realises that de Boigny is a fanatic who will throw everything into the altar fire of what he conceives to be his duty.

Also Valerie confesses her part in the betrayal of Venture to Marat and St. Just, and pleads forgiveness.

Venture makes no comment, save that he begs only leave once more to kiss her hand. She goes into the inn.

Venture thinks things out. If he permits the plot to go forward, doing his best to further it, even if it fails he reckons that Pitt will restore to him his commission. If, however, he deliberately destroys the plot, then all his chances are gone.

He goes into the inn and says that he wants a private word with de Boigny. They talk in one room. Valerie is

in the next room and finds herself forced to listen to as much of their conversation as she can overhear.

Venture says that de Boigny is well, and that now is the time to settle their quarrel. De Boigny reminds him of the plot to save the Queen, the plot to which he is pledged, and asks him if he is mad. Venture insults him, and they fight.

Venture disarms de Boigny with ease, and with his sword at his throat tells de Boigny that if he will abandon the plot and take Valerie to the coast and to England he will spare his life. De Boigny tells him to kill him.

All this Valerie hears, and all this she understands. She realises that Venture is throwing away the whole of his life's chances in order to save her.

At that moment the sergeant and his troop arrive.

De Boigny, also, has understood Venture's sacrifice, and while he wonders at it he can appreciate the tremendous courage of it.

With the troops downstairs, Venture turns to de Boigny. Valerie must not fall into the hands of these men. One good swordsman can hold the stairway. The sergeant will learn that his quarry is upstairs, and he will come with his men to capture them. While de Boigny assists Valerie to climb through the window and follows her himself, while they make their way to the stables and their horses, Venture will hold the stairs and keep the troopers in play.

He hustles de Boigny and Valerie into the arrangement, and it is only when de Boigny has two horses saddled in the stable-yard and hears the sound of shots and conflict inside the inn that he realises his position.

He tells Valerie that he will allow no man to fight his battles. He bids her await him, and, charging into the inn, he takes the attackers in the rear.

His interference gives Venture a chance to charge down the stairs. The troopers, their sergeant already dead, shocked from both sides, break. One of them cuts down de Boigny, so that he dies. Venture is free of the crush. He rushes

into the yard, where Valerie awaits him, gets to saddle, scatters the standing horses of the troopers so that they stream across the fields in all directions, and heads with Valerie into the road.

After eluding pursuit by a stratagem, he tells Valerie that her brother gave his life for him.

They reach London.

Venture can think of nothing better than to take Valerie to the house of the man in black where first he met Mr. Pitt. Mr. Pitt is there, and while the man in black talks to Venture, Pitt sends for Valerie.

The man in black has certain money for Venture, payment for the period he served in Paris as Bottier. Venture refuses the money, and says that for reasons of his own he ceased to serve Mr. Pitt and endeavoured to check the plot. He has merely called to deliver Valerie de Boigny into safe keeping and to take farewell of the man in black.

He is leaving, when Valerie appears and asks him to go with her to see Pitt. Venture is hesitant. There is a touch of his old defiant bitterness about him. He anticipates a dressing-down for having disobeyed orders.

When he sees Pitt, Pitt gives him a paper and says if it is acceptable to him he may keep it. It confers on him his old commission. Pitt indicates that Valerie has secured it for him after he himself had apparently done his best to lose it for ever.

He turns and finds Valerie at his side—very close.

## LOUIS TRACY

*(For many years the name of Louis Tracy has been associated with successful serials. No one could speak with more authority than the author of "The Park Lane Mystery.")*

It is not actually a difficult thing to give trustworthy directions for the writing of a successful serial\*story. By

"successful" I mean a story which will be acceptable by editors and fairly well liked by the majority of that definite class of the reading public which finds daily, weekly, or monthly interest in the working out of a novel from beginning to end. My definition goes not one inch farther. Neither editor nor writer can be sure in advance of publication that any work of fiction will capture a great number of readers. Many excellent books lie unnoticed on the shelves of the British Museum Library from the moment they leave the binder, whereas rubbish of the worst sort, bad in plot and style, can sell in tens of thousands.

For all that, any experienced writer can hit the happy mean; it is of that and its limitations I feel able to discourse with some degree of certainty.

Obviously, I think, an attractive serial should grip the reader's attention by the first instalment. The interest thus aroused must be held, and, if possible, increased by the second and third instalments. After that, in my opinion, provided the "plot" is well schemed to an exciting and legitimate end, the necessity for what is technically known as a "curtain" disappears. Moreover, the somewhat breathless quality of the opening chapters is not needed later, and that is all to the good if the writer has the greater qualities of his craft—a gift of epigram, a sense of dramatic art, a vivid style based on the principles of good English. These opening instalments do, however, impose very real limitations on the writer, who is compelled by the exigencies of the case to get his readers so bound up with the subject in the course of, say, five thousand words distributed over three consecutive days that they will want to follow it during the next sixty days. Such a handicap would be fatal to *Ivanhoe* or *Lorna Doone*. They, and many other great stories destined to live for years, perhaps for centuries, would be refused by every modern editor who caters for the serial market. Just imagine—Garth and Wamba would hardly have reached Cedric's abode at the end of the first week, and "Girt Jan Rid" would not have even mentioned

the Doones ! In effect, that which is read for a few minutes daily must make its appeal during those very minutes. Otherwise it is cast aside. The thrill which comes in a fortnight is lost because it has not been anticipated.

I have been asked to illustrate my meaning by selecting an example from one of my own books, neither the best nor the worst, but a fair average yarn out of the eighty odd novels I have written. So I take *The Park Lane Mystery*.

Early on a fine morning in summer a typical English butler breaks in on a scene of revelry in a room where his young master and eleven other " lads of the village " have been indulging in a disgraceful but glorious " binge." The whole twelve are laid out on the table, on chairs, and on the floor ; apparently all are so drunk that they are dead to the world. The butler is disgusted. He goes to the windows, raises the blinds, and admits plenty of fresh air. Then he notices that a goldfish, a special pet of his, is floating, belly upwards, on the surface of the water in its bowl. He sees, too, that his employer, the host of this last bachelor party before marriage, is stretched on the hearthrug, and the expression of his face differs markedly from that of any of his companions. In effect, this young man is dead, whereas the others have been drugged. But the goldfish, too, is dead. Why ?

Now I defy any hardened devourer of serials to resist the impulse which leads him or her to see next day how that particular yarn develops, so the first attack has been successful. If the second and third " waves " make a steady advance the trick is accomplished and the story may be regarded as safely launched for its arranged flight. (One moves with the times : ten years ago I would have written " voyage.")

But, mark you, a start like that is only an essential preliminary. Later must come character-drawing, strong situations in which temperaments and passions, rather than weapons, must clash, with not a little literary polish, and the sustained skill of the born story-teller. Please understand—I do not claim all or any of these qualities for my own book.

I am simply laying down a law which I and every other writer of serials have to obey to the best of our abilities. Even so what I have said is no sure guide to the production of a "best-seller." To take a homely instance—I, who know nothing about cooking, can purchase all the ingredients and follow all the instructions detailed by Escoffier in one of his famous recipes, but I would honestly advise any friend of mine not to eat the dish after I had done my best with it. It is the same with the novel. You may evolve the strongest of plots, and have every known work of reference at your elbow, but you must also have experience as a writer before you take pen in hand, or you will probably have your manuscript "returned with thanks."

### VALENTINE

*(If serial readers voted by ballot for their favourite author we should strongly fancy the chance of Valentine coming out at the top of the poll. The story which this popular author summarises below is of particular interest, as it was serialised not in a newspaper but in the "Red Magazine.")*

### GOD'S CLEARING-HOUSE "

FOR one day God will come into His Clearing-house, and the cheques that each of you has drawn on the bank of Life will be presented and payment demanded."

It is on this theme that the story is based. It revolves round the life of Daphne Alcester . . . Daphne, whose prototype can be found almost anywhere to-day.

They are invariably beautiful little people these Daphne Alcesters. Nature has equipped them lavishly with all those allurements that draw men to them as unerringly as a magnet draws steel filings. Fascinating little persons they are for

the most part whose mirrors encourage them in the belief that they are born to be petted and spoiled, and whose friends generally help to encourage such belief. And so because the forces of environment invariably outweigh those of heredity, the Daphne Alcesters of the world go gaily along the easy path of Least Resistance, holding out eager little hands to life . . . and with plenty ready and willing to fill them. Brainless they seldom are definitely cruel and callous equally seldom. That they are young, too beautiful, pleasure-loving, thoughtless, and the product of over-indulgent parents—these are the greatest and only crimes that can be laid to their charge. Argue you with them and they will probably agree smilingly with everything you say. Point out to them that they were, perhaps, made for better things and they will tell you possibly that "better things" don't interest them. They will assure you—and believe it half the time—that they are different from ordinary folk, and that the laws that govern the common herd don't apply to them. They aver that they don't interfere with other people and they don't expect other people to interfere with them. They are separate entities, they declare, and have a right to choose their own lives. . . .

It is to combat this thoughtless indifference so prevalent among a certain class of modern youth that the Reverend Vivian Manningtree, Vicar of St. Agatha's, is constantly fighting. In the opening chapter of this story he takes the theme for his text. Daphne Alcester and her friends are in the congregation that evening, drawn there merely out of idle curiosity and the possibility of hearing something that may rouse them. Yet, though it only aroused at the time a sense of uneasiness, annoyance, and irritation in Daphne, it was a sermon that she was to remember all her life. Many times during the years that followed was she to recall the words "and payment will be demanded."

Early in the story Daphne has broken off her engagement to Dudley Montrose and has become betrothed to Gervase Fleet, one of the wealthiest of London's rising K.C.'s. Fleet,

however, though he is definitely fascinated with Daphne, has no illusions about her. He has seen too much of her to imagine that it is love which has made her accept him. His five-figure income is the cause, and he knows it. But Gervase Fleet has never thought of such a thing as falling in love. Daphne is amazingly fascinating, she will be a lovely adornment for his home, and they get on very well together. . . .

Consequent on his broken engagement, Dudley Montrose shoots himself. At the inquest there is a scene caused by Montrose's mother, who denounces Daphne's conduct. And because of the prominence given to his daughter thereby, Sir Felix Alcester refuses to sanction his daughter's marriage for at least six months.

Fleet and Daphne elope, thereby causing another sensation, and cruise round the world on a long honeymoon, during which Fleet lavishes money on his young wife. They return to England for Fleet to conduct the defence of a well-known society man who is charged at the Central Criminal Court with blackmail. Fleet, though he laughingly declares to his wife that his client is as "guilty as hell," gets his acquittal by means of a wonderful and impassioned speech to the jury.

With the birth of a little daughter to them a change comes over Gervase Fleet. Fatherhood brings a new realisation of responsibilities, responsibilities not only to his little daughter but to his wife as well. And from that moment the soul of Gervase Fleet awakes.

Not so, however, his wife. The excitement of her new toy passes, and once more she drifts back to her friends and her old careless life, with an ever-growing sense of irritation at the change that has come over her husband. Yet so steadfast now has his love for her become that even her careless treatment of him, her neglect of her child, and her many thoughtless flirtations with other men affect it but little. By love, and only love, he seeks to control her.

Comes the time when—chiefly through her mother's selfishness—baby Daphne meets with a severe accident and



her life hangs in doubt. Swift repentance and remorse floods over the mother, and she strives feverishly to readjust things. But with the recovery of her child her old habits are too strong for her, and once again she drifts back. Her first lesson has recalled to her that one "cheque" has been presented, but her effort to meet it has succeeded, and it is soon forgotten.

Thoughtless, selfish, careless, impulsive, there comes into her life yet another crisis. She has a narrow escape from death one day, and once more her eyes are opened. Again a feverish desire seizes her to recapture the lost years. She realises now the real worth of her husband and all that he has tried to do, and with all her youthful impetuosity she decides to free herself of all the old influences and to devote herself utterly to him and to her baby. "It can't be too late! God will give me another chance to make up for everything!" is her one cry. Three weeks of wonderful happiness for the husband and wife pass . . .

And then Gervase Fleet loses his life in an endeavour to save a drowning child

Years have passed. Daphne has spent one year in tragic, unutterable grief, and then has given way to the bitterness of despair. She has flung herself once more into the maelstrom of heedless, reckless pleasure in fierce determination to kill her sorrow and regrets. Her health is giving way under the strain, her child is neglected, she knows in her innermost consciousness that she is bringing herself nothing but unhappiness, but she still goes fiercely on. And then comes the climax when, at a dance in a night club, she sees a girl, a young girl still in her early teens . . . a girl who laughs at her mother, and who, in company with a man of doubtful reputation, is hurrying recklessly to disaster. And it is then at last, with the thought of whither her own child may be hastening, that the soul of Daphne comes to life. . . .

Her health has given way now. The specialist who

has been called in to see her speaks gravely of consumption, of countries abroad, of complete rest and quiet . . . of the permanent abandonment of all those reckless gaieties on which she has hitherto lived.

But Daphne is awake now. The big "cheque" has been presented and she knows she has nothing with which to meet it. But she has at last new-born resolution, and a determination that nothing will ever shake. And so she sets out unafraid to rebuild her life for the sake of the right, for the sake of her dead husband for the sake of her child.

#### DOUGLAS WALSHF

*("The Wonderful Wooing," the story to which Mr. Douglas Walshf refers, is an interesting instance of the serial writer's market advantages. Originally written as a serial, it was published in the "Daily Sketch." As a 7s. 6d. novel, it was issued subsequently by Hutchinson and a 2s. edition of the story is now selling.)*

My formula for a serial is to have a definite central idea, as well as interesting characters. To me this is more important than a formal plot. I have also strong views about curtains. The day of the old-fashioned curtain, I contend, is as dead as the races between railway trains and motor-cars on the screen. In the cinema the audience of to-day knows that the rescue will be effected in time, and the wise director in consequence gives only a few feet of film to the actual chase. In the same way, in a serial the reader knows perfectly well that the hero or heroine will get out of the mess. A modern serialist should therefore, concentrate on how catastrophe is averted rather than on catastrophe itself, or else aim at stimulating interest by merely causing the reader to wonder what will happen next . . . what someone will do or say in response to what has happened. At first sight this may appear to be a distinction

without much difference. But there is really a good deal more in it than that.

Psycho-analysis—of a sort—is the theme of *The Wonderful Wooing*. The central idea is to show how a young man half seriously half humorously, endeavours to win the love of a young woman, apparently far out of his reach, by putting into practice the doctrines of the modern psychologists who preach the Power of Thought. The scheme is that all the time he shall have the Will to Win—believe in himself however hopeless things may seem ; be so sure of success that he—succeeds. In other words, it is a light-hearted sermon in the form of a love-story.

Martin Hayward, a young motor-car salesman, reads a pamphlet on Success while on his way to visit a customer about the exchange of a car. He dismisses the precepts of his pamphlet as Tosh—and then sees a girl in a vision, his ideal, after having mockingly demanded of his Subconscious (which he irreverently dubs Subby) that it should show him what he really wants of Life.

For some time he thinks each girl who attracts him is this Ideal, but at last he meets her, the Real Thing—Edith Dering, beautiful, rich and important . . . hopelessly far above him.

He is sent down to teach her to drive. Mistaking him for a mechanic, through the blundering of her butler, she offers him a tip. But in spite of this he tells himself that if only he wants her strongly enough he will get her.

Realising her mistake over the tip, and anxious to make amends, Edith asks him to dinner. There he meets Ronald West, handsome, cultured, and in love with Edith. From Ronald's aunt Mrs. West, he learns that their marriage is looked on as an absolute certainty. West, in conversation, shows himself Martin's superior in every way. But still Martin will not despair ; still he calls on Subby to back him up and see him through.

The girl is a character—wilful, a little spoilt, and very difficult for any man to handle.

Ronald, supported by his aunt, and with everything in his favour, seems to be on velvet.

But Martin refers everything to Subby. He converses with Subby, asks his advice, pictures him as present, wielding an invisible knife and fork while he wields material ones.

Things go badly. Martin meets with an accident. He has installed a wireless set for Miss Dering, and on the night of a dance the aerial collapses. Martin falls and breaks his arm after he has put matters right. In a doctor's surgery, while the arm is being set and he is partially under the influence of an anæsthetic, he blurts out his love for the beautiful young heiress . . . to whom it comes as a great shock.

Various things happen. Edith goes away with Ronald on his yacht, where, on a warm Mediterranean night, she becomes engaged to him.

Martin stays at home, trying to reach her with his mind, courting her Subconscious with his Subconscious. There is a good deal of humour as well as feeling in the story.

He starts in business for himself, and succeeds because he is determined to succeed.

But it is a terrible blow to hear that Edith is going to marry Ronald West. He will not, however, give in. His faith in Subby is increasing, as one thing after another shows him what faith in oneself can achieve. He refuses to entertain failure thoughts, and depends on Subby to pull him through.

The story is essentially a love-story. All its incidents arise from the interplay of the characters of the wilful, attractive Edith and her acknowledged lover, Ronald West, and her unacknowledged, humble lover, Martin Hayward.

In the end Martin wins her, and Subby is triumphant.

That, as nearly as I can remember, is the form in which the synopsis was originally submitted and passed. Being only

a synopsis, it was designed, of course, to give merely a general idea of the story. Just how much or how little should appear in a synopsis is a very debatable point. Editors are busy people, but all the same, though they may say they like synopses to be very brief, one must give them enough to let them gather a pretty definite idea of how the story will work out.

In this particular synopsis it will be observed by anyone who has read the story that most of the incidents and the complications have been left out. As a matter of fact, the author made them up as he went along! Or the characters did—if that is not too lofty a claim.

In the actual writing care was taken to see that each instalment contained at least one incident and moved the story along one peg. That is about the only rule I should dare to lay down for the writing of a serial story, for I am still trying to learn how to do it myself.

#### S. ANDREW WOOD

*(The name of S. Andrew Wood is familiar to countless thousands of serial readers. His name on a story is a guarantee of entertainment. We print below a synopsis of one of his many successful serials, "The Isle of Enchantment.")*

John Chatterton is a magnetic young millionaire, a self-made man, who is in love with Judy Kinsella, a very modern girl. All his minor ambitions achieved, he is possessed with the purpose of buying San Martino, a little island in the Mediterranean, to turn its neglected palazzos into casinos, its vineyards into pleasure gardens, and its beaches into a *plage*.

A French count, Leon de Barsac, on behalf of a syndicate, has similar ambitions. De Barsac is Chatterton's rival for Judy, who, independent and elusive, is in love with neither of them. Chatterton's clumsy simplicity amuses her.

Treating de Barsac as a 'pal,' Judy finds herself stranded in his company at the Mother Redcap Inn. Here de Barsac confesses a romantic and Latin intention of carrying Judy away on his steam yacht to San Martino, having created the impression that they are married. Judy manages to escape, after an adventure in the cider cellar, and next morning is taken home by Tony Buckenham, a young down-and-out aristocrat who has long been in love with her. Buckenham, after a vagabondage in a caravan, is returning to become the secretary, and mentor in good breeding, of John Chatterton.

Arriving home, Judy finds her reputation, in the eyes of her guardians, completely gone. She packs her bag and leaves home.

In London a friendly theatrical manager gets her a position as companion to Panchita Gonsales, a charming, untutored little Spanish dancer. Panchita, from sheer love of romance, entices her on board de Barsac's steam yacht, and Judy awakens to find herself bound for San Martino. The island is owned by a patriarchal old American, Ezra van Oppen, who is blind and dying. He is only kept alive by the hope of his school-girl daughter's return from America. He wishes to hand on his regnancy as uncrowned king of the island to her. At de Barsac's urging, Judy masquerades as Maisie, van Oppen's daughter, and satisfies the old man's last desire in life by promising to baulk both Chatterton and de Barsac of their designs to turn the island into a second Monte Carlo.

The action of the story brings John Chatterton and Tony Buckenham to San Martino, and in the setting of blue Mediterranean and Arcadian island a duel of romance and adventure takes place, with the headstrong and resourceful Judy the storm-centre. Panchita, the Spanish dancer, in love like a passionate child with Tony Buckenham, "the young hidalgo," adds further piquancy by arriving at San Martino.

Judy, still masquerading as Maisie van Oppen, mistress of San Martino, is almost persuaded by circumstances to take de Barsac as her bridegroom, but the masterful John Chatterton

is beginning to attract her. By exposing her masquerade and obtaining the lease from the Italian Government, he means to achieve his purpose, but only, in his half-practical, half-poetic way, to lay it at Judy's feet. Suddenly the bubble is burst by the arrival of the real Maisie van Oppen with her sailor husband from California. She had run away from school on a roving honeymoon, completely disappearing.

Chatterton, weary of Judy's caprice and beaten in his purpose, goes back to England at the very moment when modern Judy discovers she loves him. The tables are turned, and Judy, following Chatterton to England, and appearing in the hunting county where she had been ostracised realises that she must gain Chatterton or die.

In the meantime—de Barsac having been nearly permanently crippled by Chatterton—the two minor characters, Panchita and Tony Buckenham, go gypsying together into the interior of the island, unwittingly conforming to certain "customs of the country" which precede marriage, and are coolly married by a jovial old priest—*hidalgo* and Spanish gypsy girl thus reaching their destiny of romance. Panchita, with her broken English slang and her unspoiled nature, is, in her way, as attractive a little heroine as Judy herself.

The story comes to an end with the surrender of both masterful man and masterful maid in the only way in which Romance should end.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WOMEN AND POPULAR FICTION

*Largest percentage of serial readers are women—Woman's growing influence on fiction—Men writers should study woman—"Heroines" more important than "heroes"—Feminine point of view in fiction—Coleridge on sex appeal—Victorian and modern heroines—Growing frankness in sexual matters—Feminine psychology and morality—The gentle art of flattery.*

"WHO does not write to please the women?" said Byron. It is generally acknowledged that the great majority of serial readers are women. With the exception of "crook" and mystery stories, the writer's main appeal is always directed to women, and even in "crook" stories a love interest is always insisted upon by the editor. It is also a fact that young girls are avid readers of the "crook" and detective class of fiction, whether it contains love interest or not.

Women's growing influence upon literature, the theatre, and, in fact, all forms of art is most interesting and significant. Whether it is that women live a more leisurely and contemplative life; whether their nature is more emotional than man's, and demands more emotional food, or whatever the reason may be, it is certain that women are great readers to-day. They demand a wide variety of fiction, and the supply is



constantly increasing to meet the demand. Newspapers are giving more and more space to women's needs and interests, and even news items are being subtly coloured by a kind of rose pink of feminism.

The writer of serial fiction cannot afford to ignore this important aspect of his work. Since his readers, and therefore his "clients," are mostly women, he must realise that the proper study of mankind is woman!

Most writers have a fair amount of the woman in their emotional and intellectual "make-up." They feel instinctively what a woman's reactions to certain sets of circumstances will be; they possess a sympathetic insight that is capable of crossing the frontier of sex. Possibly the finest type of man has much of the woman in his nature, and also the finest type of woman possesses many attributes commonly regarded as essentially masculine. Few, if any, are a hundred per cent male or female, as Weininger pointed out.

The male writer, even the literary aspirant, will probably be aided by intuition to an understanding of women, but he should study in every way to improve his insight and knowledge.

The man who cannot skilfully portray a woman's character will be severely handicapped. There is a number of highly successful men novelists whose women characters never really live; whose love scenes are unconvincing; and whose knowledge of the world seems to end at Woman. These men are successful because they are clever writers, and they succeed despite their great handicap. They concentrate upon what they can do, and scamp the "feminine" passages in their novels which they know to be beyond them.

But obviously, though such men are successful, they are not nearly as successful as they might be, if only they possessed real insight into feminine psychology. They cannot give women the things that most women want, and therefore a vast section of the public will never buy their books. Such novelists remain "men's writers."

The masculine writer who is going to be famous, or even the writer who is only going to be successful, must not be limited to an understanding of his own sex only. He must take all knowledge to be his province. He must be able to represent the conversation of women over teacups, as well as he can reproduce the talk of men collected together in the bar of their club.

The thing is difficult to do. Many clever men fail in their fiction to get anywhere near the soul of a woman, and it is equally true that some women novelists have failed hopelessly to portray the ordinary gossip of men among themselves.

The would-be author should study the opposite sex, from the literary point of view, and study closely. A young man writing serials should understand that to-day the heroine has superseded the hero in importance. The "feminine angle" is necessary in fiction; everything being presented as far as possible from the heroine's point of view. The larger success in fiction writing will be impossible to the man who does not understand women adequately.

Such writers as Warwick Deeping owe a great deal of their enormous popularity to the skill with which they portray women, and the amazing understanding they reveal of women's minds and characters. The late

W. L. George acquired quite a reputation for his insight into the psychology of women.

The male aspirant should study such writers as these, as well as the work of women novelists themselves. Margaret Kennedy's brilliant novel, *The Constant Nymph*, is essentially the work of a woman. Beatrice Kean Seymour, Naomi Royde-Smith, and Storm Jameson all handle women in fiction with notable success.

Shakespeare's women are some of the best-drawn characters in literature, and great writers like Heine, Coleridge, and Hazlitt have written essays upon them which might be studied with advantage.

What are the essential differences between the outlook of a man and of a woman? Coleridge, who was a subtle metaphysician as well as a great poet, affirmed that "a woman looked for strength in a man, whilst a man looked for delicacy in a woman." This aphorism may or may not be generally true, but at least it is highly suggestive.

Women readers, for a long time, would seem to have delighted in the "cave man" hero who, after all, is intended to represent masculine strength and virility. It is also true that, whilst men like a heroine who is courageous, they are not usually attracted to one who is bold, audacious, or too self-sufficing.

Whatever the ultra-moderns may think or say, the great reading public still like their heroines to be "sweet" and "lovable," though this does not mean that they should be as helpless and inane as their Victorian prototypes.

The days when the demure and dutiful daughter was ready—in fiction—to marry any kind of blackguard to save her father or brother from financial embarrassment have gone for ever. Motives now must be more plausible, and “heroines” must be of a type that will not insult and infuriate women readers.

In popular fiction, heroines still continue to be “sweet” and altruistic, but they must have character. Self-sacrifice is always a moving theme, but it must not be senseless sacrifice.

The heroine need not be beautiful. May Christie, for one, believes in the plain heroine. To quote this talented author’s own words: “Think of the million housewives from Hornsey to Tooting Bec who are as plain as pikestaffs and who thrill to the idea that the heroine of their particular serial has neither beauty nor smart clothes nor money. And yet the strong man trembles before her *womanhood*!”

The masculine writer must try and see his heroine as an intelligent woman reader will see her. If he cannot draw a heroine who is lovable without being “sloppy,” he must experiment until he can manage it, or else stick to purely masculine forms of fiction.

It is no easy matter to paint a heroine of conventional fiction and keep her “alive.” To start with her virtues are so much against the author! Only too often, the “villain,” “villainess,” and minor characters, tend to predominate in a story simply because they *do* things, whilst the hero and heroine do nothing.

A first essential in popular fiction writing is to get away from pasteboard figures, especially from a pasteboard heroine. The heroine must not be too negatively

virtuous. Give her a quick temper, which often goes with a generous nature. Make her hasty, wilful, ambitious—unscrupulous even when the end to be achieved is a good one—but whatever you do, make her charming, and make her live.

The heroine must be a type that any intelligent woman can feel with, and identify herself with, without being convinced that she is acting or thinking with impossible foolishness.

Conventions are changing very rapidly, and in many ways the change in the conventional attitude of the sexes makes things easier for the writer of popular fiction. That is, it is easier for him to write a popular story with more sincerity and verisimilitude. This is an age that prides itself upon its frankness, and scorns the old Victorian hypocrisy (very often unconscious) that led to so much misery, suppression, and self-deception.

Since the war it has been possible to write popular fiction with far more realism than editors would have accepted fifteen years ago. And realism, judiciously and moderately applied, is becoming more and more a feature of even the most sentimental type of serial.

Women novelists, in particular, are far more outspoken on sex matters than most men writers. Very often they can deal with sex themes with far less self-consciousness than men appear to do.

The modern writer of popular fiction should realise the change in outlook on sex matters that is going on, partly through the influence of the war, and partly through the spreading knowledge of analytical psychology with its probing into the subconscious mind.

It may seem a far cry from Havelock Ellis, Freud, and Jung to the writing of serials, in reality it is not. Serial fiction is changed and modified by public knowledge, taste, and requirements.

Freer thought on sex matters will mean a different attitude of one sex towards another; it will mean a different type of hero and heroine, and a greater frankness and honesty in dealing with their relationship.

The sacrifice of young fresh lives to old and selfish parents—a theme once generally accepted—is now repugnant to nearly all readers, and this is again due to the war and to the theories of psycho-analysts.

It is a mistake to imagine that people must read the works of Freud and Jung in order to become aware of their fundamental teachings. Knowledge and theories of this kind permeate our newspapers, inspire novelists, lecturers, and public speakers, and affect the production of films.

People who never heard of Mr. Havelock Ellis have had their attitude on important matters influenced by his writings, just as people who never read Shakespeare have their common speech affected by his language.

Love stories are being written in a franker manner in serial fiction, and written with more real knowledge and understanding on the part of the author. The number of women writers is increasing very rapidly, as women enter professional life more and more. To-day there is a great number of brilliant women novelists spreading abroad the attitude of women on all conceivable kinds of subjects, and the observant young writer can make a profitable study of their work.

Perhaps, on the whole, the male and female viewpoint differs less than is imagined. Women probably have less love of abstract reasoning and theorising than men have ; woman's code of morals will be largely a matter of emotion and right feeling rather than argumentative hair-splitting. In her heart woman has always had a certain contempt for " man-made law," and though, owing to her love of the home, woman pays more respect to the small conventions and proprieties than man, yet she usually has a broader, more elastic moral code.

Undoubtedly a woman's sympathies are as keenly aroused for the " under dog " as those of a man. And if the " under dog " has gone under because of his love for a woman, then women readers will excuse him almost anything. All the feminine world, at least, loves a lover, and no woman can think very badly of a man who loves her, whatever he may be. The success, with women, of such a book as *The Beloved Vagabond*, by W. J. Locke, is an illustration of our meaning.

The young author who aims at writing for the large feminine public must study these aspects of woman's psychology. It is not enough to be able to avoid glaring mistakes in matters of feminine dress and fashion. It is of course a confession of ineptitude to say " she was dressed in some soft clinging material " that leaves all women readers unsatisfied—amused or annoyed. But it is not sufficient to be learned in materials and modes, one must get the woman's point of view if one wishes to really interest women.

It does not matter very much what the male author's views upon women are, so long as he *has* views, and is keenly interested in them. He may be an ardent feminist,

or he may incline to the Oriental viewpoint as expressed by Schopenhauer—the great thing is that he must be able to depict women in an interesting, provocative, and vivid manner.

In popular fiction he will be more likely to win over women readers if he flatters them than if he abuses them, though abuse is far better than indifference.

Flattery is a powerful weapon. Women are just as susceptible to flattery as men, and anyone who has studied the popular periodicals during the last decade or so will note that women readers have been given their meed of praise. In many cases it has been laid on with the proverbial trowel.

There is, for example, the oft-recurring story of the frantically busy husband who unconsciously neglects his beautiful wife in order to heap up money for her, and “give her the things she wants.” Enter the lover who attempts to console the neglected beauty, and who nearly wins her, until the adoring husband, realising how things are going, saves her from running off with a black-guard. The curtain comes down upon a contrite wife and husband united in mutual understanding.

Now this type of story is obviously written entirely for women, and is flattering to the woman. It depicts the woman as beautiful and desirable ; it points out that whoever gets the woman is a very lucky man indeed ; it shows what a fool a man is to neglect his wife, and, in fact, the whole story is woven around the fight for desirable and charming Woman, who is the centre of the universe.

Many of these stories are highly artificial and unconvincing. The husband is more blind and neglectful than any loving husband could well be ; the wife flirts so



enthusiastically with the idea of infidelity that the final understanding of husband and wife leaves the intelligent reader wondering what such security is worth, and also what the woman is worth ! But despite its crudities, this type of story seems to be a perennial favourite with a host of periodicals. It is woman's fiction, and it flatters women.

Another type of story, usually written by sincere feminists, is the kind that takes for its slogan : " Behind every great man is a woman."

Men writers who subscribe to this theory will attribute Nelson's naval victories to Lady Hamilton, and Napoleon's military decline to his divorce from Josephine.

This school is always writing stories where an able and " strong " man of self-sufficing and complacent type is, in reality, led upwards to success by a woman. Usually the man is patronising towards the woman, and never realises, until confronted by disaster, to what extent he is indebted to her for his success. The woman guides and directs him without ever letting him see that she is directing. And in the end the strong man realises that he is weak and helpless as a babe without the woman.

Of this type is *What Every Woman Knows*, always a great favourite whenever it is revived—and the percentage of women in the audience is very high !

This type of work can be fascinating and charmingly sentimental, as in Barrie's play, and, if the dice are loaded in order to score the desired points, no one will quarrel with so delightful a theme.

There is, of course, much truth in the assertion that " behind every great man is a woman." The only question is, how far behind ?

What is true of one man will not be true of another, but there have been notorious examples of great men, especially great artists, enormously aided in their work by women. A man's reaction to woman's charms is subtle, and impossible to measure. It begins in maternal influence that lasts a lifetime ; it is continued by the stimulation of sexual attraction, and with some great men every fresh love affair has meant a new work of art.

The theme of *What Every Woman Knows* can be, and has been, rewritten over and over again, from many different angles. It is an attractive motif into which a writer can put all the charm and romance of which he is capable. And his story will always be popular with women.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHAT SERIAL EDITORS WANT

THIS chapter contains a list of the most important British serial buyers. It does not pretend to be exhaustive ; indeed, with the serial market fluctuating so rapidly, no such list could remain comprehensive for more than a few weeks. There are some omissions, but the list as a whole may be regarded as generally indicative of the markets for the serial writer's work.

In Chapter VII the problem of the serial was variously discussed from the angle of the author ; here we are able to present the views, in most instances, of the buyers themselves. The contributions may be left to speak for themselves, but we wish to put on record our gratitude to those busy serial editors who found time not only to furnish a statement of their individual requirements, but to offer the serial writer advice which is literally invaluable. Marketing plays an important part in all literary work ; in the case of the serial it is, perhaps, the supremely important aspect. Only by considering and observing editorial requirements is it possible to cultivate the serial field with profit.

**Allied Newspapers, Ltd.** (*Daily Dispatch, Evening Chronicle, Sunday Chronicle, Empire News, Sporting Chronicle*)

*Athletic News, World's Pictorial News, Ideas, Boys Magazine, Betty's Paper, Week End Novels, etc.)*

"The newspapers and periodicals owned by Allied Newspapers Limited are so many and various that the types of serials required cover a wide range—from sensational boys' adventure stories for *Boys' Magazine*, and highly-coloured romantic love stories for our women's papers, to the very highest class of serial fiction for the *Sunday Chronicle* and our other Sunday and daily newspapers.

"The most important quality in a serial story for any of our papers is 'grip.' Fine writing is no use if the plot is not strong, the action swift, the motives probable, the characters alive and fascinating.

"Stories about neurotic people, propaganda stories, stories dealing mainly with sordid, sensual or 'cranky' phases of life are unsuitable.

"An arresting central theme is necessarily a part of a really good serial. 'Stories that meander from triviality to triviality, and stories written round plots so involved that the reader finds it difficult to remember this week what she was reading about last week, do not make good serials. We do not want them in this office.

"Except in stories for boys, a strong love interest is essential. The heroine should be the principal character.

"The unknown writer stands as good a chance here as the writer of established reputation—if the story submitted possesses the necessary thrill and appeal. It is indeed our pride that many a successful fiction writer of to-day was quite unknown when he or she first submitted a story to us."  
—WILLIAM LEES (Fiction Editor, Allied Newspapers Ltd.).

**The Amalgamated Press, Ltd.** (Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4).

*All Sports.* (Every Thursday, 2d.)

Publishes one serial (4,000 word instalments) of a sporting interest, with a slight love element and quick action.

*Answers.* (Every Saturday, 2d.)

Publishes one serial (five thousand to six thousand word instalments) of a type to appeal to the very wide circle of *Answers* readers. Strong dramatic plot, dealing with any and every phase of society. There should be love interest and plenty of action, and, most important of all, real humanity in characterisation and dialogue.

*Argosy.* (Monthly, 1s.)

Publishes only classic books in serial form, or serials by well-known authors.

*Cassell's Magazine.* (Monthly, 1s.)

Publishes serials and three-part stories, generally by well-known authors. Strong plot and treatment essential.

*Children's Newspaper.* (Every Thursday, 2d.)

A serial story is run sometimes of school life, sometimes of adventure, in instalments of approximately 2,000 words.

*Chums.* (Every Saturday, 2d.)

Publishes three serials of 5,000 words each instalment, dealing with school and sport, home adventure and foreign adventure.

*Corner Magazine.* (Monthly, 7d.)

Publishes serials dealing with crime and mystery. Very strong plot essential.

*Eve's Own.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

Strong romantic fiction with plenty of movement, to appeal to middle-class girls from sixteen years upwards.

*Girls' Friend.* (Every Tuesday, 2d.)

Publishes four serials (6,000 word instalments) ranging in subject from society and stage life to domestic romance. Suggestions for serials likely to arouse the sympathy and enthusiasm of the average girl are welcomed.

*Family Journal.* (Every Wednesday, 2d.)

This paper appeals to the working-class family. It uses three serials of a domestic and sympathetic character, about 4,000 word instalments.

*Football and Sports Favourite.* (Every Wednesday, 2d.)

Sporting stories—football, racing, boxing—with plenty of movement and a love interest. Appeals to youths in factories and workshops.

*Home Chat.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

One serial is used, with an average instalment of 3,000 to 3,500 words. Stories should be brightly written and contain a strong romantic appeal.

*Home Companion.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

Appeals strongly to working girls and women. Three serial stories are used of a domestic type, with gripping situations and a good emotional love element. Instalments average 4,000 words.

*Horner's Stories.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

There should be a high moral tone in contributions submitted to this journal—sweet love stories without worldly interest. Two serials are used with average instalments of 4,500 words.

*Little Folks.* (Monthly, 1s.)

Two serial stories (six instalments of about 6,000 words) are given in each half-yearly volume. These should be either school or adventure stories suitable for boys and girls of twelve to sixteen years of age.

*Modern Weekly.* (Every Saturday, 2d.)

One serial is used, instalments averaging 4,000 words in length. Stories should be brightly written, contain plenty of action and a strong love interest.

*New Magazine.* (Monthly, 1s.)

Publishes serials and three-part stories. Specialises in humour, mystery and romance.

*Pictorial Weekly.* (Every Tuesday, 2d.)

One strong dramatic serial is used, with either a home or picturesque foreign setting (not Europe) and a strong love interest. Average length of instalments 4,500 words. total length about 60,000 words.

*Poppy's Paper* (Every Monday 2d.)

Two serials with strong love interest containing sensational and quick action, approximating 4,000 words each instalment. Must be full of exciting interest and colour. Good intriguing "curtains" are necessary.

*Quiver*. (Monthly, 1s.)

Publishes two serials (of about 60,000 to 70,000 words) of domestic character. Whilst not being actually religious they should appeal to a more serious-minded folk than the ordinary fiction magazines.

*The Red Magazine*. (Alternate Fridays, 7d.)

"There are three things necessary for a serial story: the dominant idea, or theory which the author will seek to prove; the plot, which the uninitiated will call the story, and sincerity. All three are understandable without further explanation, although sincerity is often thrown overboard by many writers at an early opportunity. True, many successful stories have been written without sincerity, in the sense that I use it. A murder mystery, for instance, depends on sensation and the clever handling of characters: so does an adventure story. In these two classes the plot may be used alone, without a dominant idea or sincerity. But in other stories, where the writer depends on atmosphere, characterisation, suggestion—in short, in what we term the better stories, without sincerity the story fails.

"Regard the success of Miss Ethel M. Dell, who has had as many imitators as any living author. Those imitators realised the dominant cave-man idea; they were as clever in working out a slightly extravagant plot, but they lacked the sincerity with which Miss Dell writes, and they failed. The author who writes serious fiction with his tongue in his cheek will seldom convince even an unintelligent public. Believe in your story, live with your characters, and you will stand an infinitely better chance of succeeding with editors than if you did otherwise."—W. A. O'DONNELL.\*

*Sports Budget.* (Every Thursday, 2d.)

(See *Football and Sports Favourite.*)

*Story-Teller.* (Monthly, 1s.)

Publishes serials and three-part stories occasionally, generally by well-known authors. The work is always of high literary standard.

*Sunday Circle.* (Every Wednesday, 2d.)

Three serials are used, with average instalments of 4,500 words. A religious or moral atmosphere should be introduced, and love and domestic interest with plenty of movement.

*Sunday Companion.* (Every Thursday, 2d.)

Uses three serials of a domestic, romantic character, which are not obtrusively religious, but have a strong moral tone, and sometimes a hero engaged in clerical work. Instalments 5,000 to 6,000 words in length.

*Sunday Stories.* (Every Wednesday, 2d.)

Two serials are used, approximating 5,000 words each instalment. Good wholesome sentiment, with a touch of drama, are the chief essentials

*Union Jack.* (Every Thursday, 2d.)

Serial policy changes from time to time. Includes stories of adventure and action on varied themes, written in a style "to appeal to readers of all ages," but present (1927) policy is for continued stories featuring Sexton Blake, of the same type and treatment as the complete stories given every week featuring the same detective character. Length, 80,000 to 120,000 words. Weekly instalments, 5,000 to 7,000 words. Preliminary discussion essential.

*Woman and Home.* (Monthly, 6d.)

Uses one serial, strongly romantic in appeal, modern in tone, and written in a style conforming to magazine standard. Average length of instalments 10,000 to 12,000 words.



*Woman's Pictorial.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

One serial run in about eight instalments of 6,000 words each. Strong love and human interest. Plenty of incident. This journal caters for the well-educated middle-class woman of between twenty and forty.

*Woman's Weekly.* (Every Tuesday, 2d.)

Runs two serials averaging 4,000 words each instalment, of strong romantic interest.

*Woman's World.* (Every Monday, 2d.)

Publishes three serials of domestic and romantic character, modern setting, approximating 4,000 words each instalment, and of a type likely to appeal to the working-class woman.

The foregoing notes have been compiled to afford contributors a guide to the general requirements of the leading publications of the Amalgamated Press. It should be realised, however, that no very rigid formula can be laid down.

Manuscripts should be typewritten, on one side of the paper only. If accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope, every care is taken to return rejected contributions, but no responsibility is undertaken in this direction.

Contributors, having selected from the list the journals to which they feel their writing capacity most suited, are strongly advised to make a special study of the matter in the actual papers. Obviously it is impossible in a few lines to do more than afford an indication of the material used. As a matter of convenience, serial stories may be submitted in the form of a first instalment and synopsis. This instalment should be a third longer than those given under individual headings.

Contributions sent to the Central Editorial Service, the Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, are read and shown to those publications for which they are thought most suitable. Matter

may, however, be sent direct to individual papers or magazines at the discretion of the contributor

**The Associated Newspapers** (*Daily Mail*, *Evening News*, etc.) require "strong" dramatic stories of modern British life, and detective stories with a love interest.

**Sunday Graphic** (200 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).

"Nothing is too good for *Sunday Graphic* readers. We want the best stories by the best writers.

"The *Sunday Graphic* makes a special feature of its serials which must appeal to men and women equally. Good writing, swift incidental or emotional action, and a strong central theme of romance or mystery interest are essential. Historical subjects are not barred, but politics and religion should be avoided. The length varies, but roughly speaking this should not be less than 25,000 and not more than 40,000 words. Sometimes a series of stories is taken; but these must have a connecting link, though each may be complete in itself. With a weekly paper it is important to remember that each instalment must strongly grip the mind and imagination, and have a very intriguing curtain."

—THE SERIAL EDITOR

**The Daily Express** (8, Shoe Lane, E.C.4).

"I am to answer: What are your requirements in serial fiction?"

"If every other editor would deem it sufficient to reply: 'I have no set formula for serial fiction. I just want interesting, human stories,' then mine would be one of the loudest voices in the chorus.

"As it is, I am expected to dissect the *Daily Express* serial and exhibit the component parts for the enlightenment of the ever-growing number of would-be *Daily Express* serial writers.

"Is it not enough, I plaintively ask, if I say that the *Daily*

*Express* wants in its serials no more, if no less, than those most popular ingredients, action (plenty of it), strong love interest, vividly drawn characters, and good 'curtains'?

"It is difficult to be more explicit. And supposing it were not, I am inclined to think that it would scarcely be worth while being more explicit, since it is my experience that only about one serial writer in fifty or so has the slightest idea of what he is at.

"Many serial writers have not outgrown the archaic notion that the serial story, while it must be highly remunerative to the author, need not contain elements more vital than a reasonably good plot and plenty of movement.

"It is because serial readers now demand more than these things that one is so often glad to serialise the work of famous writers.

"Yet I think there is no doubt at all that, in spite of the recognised masters of the art of fiction writing, there is as good a chance as ever for the new-comer to this field.

"Like every other editor, I am on the look-out for really promising new writers; this applies as forcefully to the new serial writer as it does to the purveyor of topical articles.

"I have not revealed any secrets, you will have regretfully observed. There are no secrets to reveal. I wish there were; then I could be sure, perhaps, of getting the serials I want.

"As a last word, I suggest that the student of serials might do himself some good and, incidentally, the editors for whom he hopes to write, if he give his close attention to the *Daily Express* serial, *Golden Vanity*, by F. E. Baily, which is running at the moment of writing

"This excellent story was specially written at my request for serial use; it has all the qualities of the good serial and none of the defects of the serial-novel. I suggest that every aspirant to serial fame could read it with profit."

—REGINALD POUND, Literary Editor, *Daily Express*.

**The Daily Mail** (Northcliffe House, E.C.4). (See Associated Newspapers Ltd.)

**The Daily Mirror** (Geraldine House, Fetter Lane, E.C.).

**The News Chronicle** (Bouverie Street, E.C.4).

" I know of only one standard for a daily newspaper serial, whether morning or evening, and that is interest—interest both of topic and of incident. The serial has no place in a newspaper if it does not seize the attention of great masses of readers in the first instalment and hold it day by day until the end. The newspaper's first function is to provide news: another function no less important, performed by the serial, is to rest the mind of the tired reader, not by providing 'dope,' but by taking it out of its personal worries and preoccupations into an atmosphere of romance—*clean* romance, of course—where jangled nerves may be restored. The great stories of Dickens made their first appearance in serial form; they were full of incident: first and last and all the time they were great yarns. As yarns, newspaper serials must be judged. I do not think the average newspaper reader is interested in historical or political fiction: he does not want powder in his jam, he wants 'straight' fiction.

" The Time of the ideal serial is Now: and the writer has an easier task if the venue is Here. But I have known serials laid in remote countries to be very successful when the writers were skilled story-tellers who wrote of what they knew."

—W. A. EBBUTT

**The Daily Sketch** (200, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).

" We want a good story, well and brightly told—these are three *sine qua nons*.

" *Theme*: There is no hard-and-fast rule, but generally speaking religion and politics should be avoided always, and humour nearly always—serial readers appear to have a very slight sense of humour! Love tangles, without nastiness,

adventure, mystery, drama, and open-air tales all appeal to us, but there must always be a love interest, though this need not necessarily be the dominant theme. The fantastically imaginative story should never be attempted by any but a master hand.

*“ Construction :* The plot should be well balanced and the incident evenly distributed. In short instalments such as those published in the *Daily Sketch* it is not possible to mark time. Serial readers are greedy, and expect to be taken a step farther every day, to the accompaniment of some sort of thrill or excitement. All side issues, except those essential to the working out of the main theme, should be avoided and the plot should move forward swiftly with increasing interest to its climax. Although the day of the artificial curtain has gone, the writer should endeavour to round off each instalment intriguingly, without sounding a false note.

*“ Characterisation :* Characters should be well defined and true to life. They should be drawn more by action and conversation, than actual description ; where the latter method is necessary, let it be brief—just a few pithy sentences interpolated in the text here and there. The same rule applies to introspection. Let the readers have clear, but very brief, glances into the minds of the characters. Solid ‘ chunks ’ of description, introspection, and thinking are deadly in a serial with short instalments. Do not overcrowd the stage.

*“ Style :* Write straightforwardly and simply. Avoid long and involved sentences and lengthy paragraphs. Reduce the employment of dots, dashes, foreign words, and phrases almost to vanishing point. If it be necessary to your story to introduce some point of special knowledge, explain it, having first made sure you know what you are talking about. Composition and punctuation need much more attention than they receive from the average writer.

*“ Length :* 71,750 words, written in thirty instalments. First instalment 5,000 ; second and third 3,000 each ; the remaining twenty-seven 2,250 each. The ‘ motive ’ of the

story should at least be indicated in the first instalment which must close on a strong note.

" *Our Public* consists of both men and women, of all ages, and in all walks of life.

" *General Remarks* : Serial writing is a much cruder form of writing than novel writing ; there is no space for the finer issues, or a comprehensive survey of things and people. One must take a short cut to every point of interest, and only those points which are essential to the story should be touched upon. You may not dally on the way, however tempted you may be to do so. It is a process of elimination all the time, and it is a good plan to re-read each instalment as it is written, and ruthlessly strike out every word and phrase which has no direct bearing on the plot. The result will be a well-knit story, which will not drag at any point."

—THE SERIAL EDITOR.

**The Evening Standard** (47, Shoe Lane, E.C.4).

**Grand Magazine** (Messrs. Geo. Newnes Ltd., Southampton Street, W.C.2).

**Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd.** (34 Paternoster Row, E.C.4).

Many new writers are inclined to forget that a good book does not necessarily make a good serial, and are therefore unduly discouraged when their MSS. are refused by magazine editors.

We think that the first essential of a serial, no matter for what type of publication it is designed, is a plot full of incident, in order that interest may be sustained from day to day, week to week, or month to month as the case may be.

**Messrs. John Leng & Co., Ltd.** (see *Thomson-Leng Publications*).

**The People** (93, Long Acre, W.C.2).

"A famous literary gourmet once likened a serial story to a meal of many courses, each satisfying in itself but leaving the palate sufficiently whetted to enjoy the more those to follow, rising to a climax or main dish and concluding with a light chapter for digestion.

"He was nearly right. The modern serial story too often errs by giving its readers mental indigestion before they are a third of the way through it. There is far too much forced action.

"The tendency of starting the opening chapters with smashing action is like starting on a joint without the stimulus of a *hors d'œuvres*. Action-crammed stories not only become wearisome, but the chapters fail to leave any zest for those that follow.

"Serial story writers can learn what the public wants from the cinema. Picture plays have changed. At one period producers strove for action, action, all the time. Nowadays action has been superseded by quietly moving drama in which suspense plays the star part and which leads up to tense situations. Life is made up of laughter and tears. Serial stories should be the same."

—H. AINSWORTH (Editor).

**Pearson's Weekly** (18 Henrietta Street, W.C.2).

"It is really impossible to set down what is really wanted for a good serial story except that it must have a strong dramatic human interest. It is very rarely that a novel, written for book publication, will make a good serial. Serials should be written for serial publication and not with the idea of ultimate book publication. Serial editors cannot afford to publish a bad serial in the same way that publishers occasionally risk doubtful novels. The book publisher is bound to sell a few copies, and the failure of a book will not injure his imprint, but if a periodical publishes a bad serial its readers will simply melt away.

" *Pearson's Weekly* likes first instalments of about seven to ten thousand words, but we do not insist on a synopsis of the remainder unless that is necessary to show how a certain mystery is cleared up.

" It is easier to tell prospective writers what *Pearson's Weekly* does not want. When in a difficult position it is often easy for a writer to kill someone off by the use of some Eastern poison that leaves no trace. This is merely a trick idea. If poison must be used it should be one of the known kinds. Long accounts of thrilling rescues from fires, storms at sea, or railway accidents often become tedious to the reader. Also stories written in strong dialect. Even if the story takes place in Devonshire or Yorkshire make the main part of the conversation of the story in ordinary English. Coincidence should be avoided as far as possible. It weakens the story tremendously. Climaxes should be developed gradually and made to appear natural.

" Authors, as a rule, don't give nearly enough thought to the names of their characters. The name should indicate the personality, as far as possible, of the man or woman. For instance, a name like Benjamin Hawthorn for a big ironfounder in the Midlands would convey the picture of the type of man much more than a name like Jack Smith.

" Keep the scenes of a story mainly to England. The average reader of *Pearson's Weekly* doesn't know enough about countries abroad and the people who live there to want to read solely about them. Let the characters go abroad and have experiences abroad, but let them come back to England before the story ends, otherwise the story loses a lot of its appeal for readers. All the characters should be English unless their nationality has a definite dealing with the story, such as Dr. Fu Manchu has with stories. Introduce, if you like, a French Count or Russian Bolshevik, but keep the main characters British.

" Never let politics enter into a story. It would never be popular, and no serial editor would be keen on it.



"Curtains in serial stories should be natural climaxes to instalments, and should never be brought in merely to leave the reader uncertain as to what is going to happen next."

—F. J. LAMBURN.

### **The Referee** (17 Tudor Street, E.C.4)

"In my opinion the most popular serial story is one founded on a plot with a strong human interest and with good literary quality. These I would class as essentials.

"A story with strong dramatic situations or episodes which intrigue the readers' minds and stimulate their imagination, with pathos and humour wisely blent, is the one which brings a glint of satisfaction to the eye of the editor lucky enough to have it submitted.

"In this connection it may, perchance, be too quixotic to hope for a revival of the conditions which prevailed when the issue of *Pickwick Papers* in monthly parts was awaited with breathless interest and delirious joy by all classes who had or could borrow the necessary shilling, but I suppose that every editor secretly longs that such a 'scoop' might some day come his way.

"Of course the best SERIAL story is that which is so constructed that it has one or two strong situations in each chapter, complete episodes in a way—thus satisfying the reader to a point—and yet not so complete that it fails to awaken and hold an anticipatory interest in the development of the situation so created.

"For this reason, the space usually allotted to a serial in a newspaper should be carefully studied by authors and, when possible, they should provide for what we term a 'good curtain' at the end of each instalment. This saves much tiresome cutting and editing.

"Attention to this is perhaps of greater importance to the 'weekly' than to the 'daily,' since a longer lapse occurs between the publication of instalments with a consequent forgetting by readers of the threads of the story.

"Finally, to refer back to my first paragraph, it is impossible to lay down a rule as to what is 'strong human interest,' but, taking one's experience of the readers of serial stories as a whole—one might say of fiction readers as a whole—the most acceptable story is the one which tells of the love of a man for a woman, told healthily—not morbidly—and with a happy ending if possible, although not necessarily, since it must be true to life.

"A weekly journal such as the *Referee*, which aims to produce a family newspaper, needs must hold the balance very carefully on all matters which might offend good taste—and this applies particularly to the fiction columns.

"In these days of struggle and intensive human output readers require to be interested and amused, but always sanely and cleanly—at least, I think so.

"The mind's the standard of the man, and the editor who ignores it is no friend to his readers, and may be a menace to the State."

W. J. ROBERTS.

**Reynolds's Illustrated Newspapers** (8 Temple Avenue, E.C.4).

**The Star** (See *News-Chronicle*), (Bouverie Street, E.C.4).

**Sunday Express** (8, Shoe Lane, E.C.4).

**Sunday News** (3, Salisbury Square, E.C.4).

**The Sunday Pictorial** (Geraldine House Fetter Lane E.C.).

**Tit-Bits** (Messrs. George Newnes Ltd., Southampton Street, W.C.2).

"It is impossible to say what I specially require in a serial for *Tit-Bits*. What I am always looking for is a first-rate story—a story written from the heart that will appeal to the hearts of the great public.

"The request of childhood. 'Tell me a story,' remains with all of us throughout our lives, we all want to be told a good story. There is, in fact, no set type of *Tit-Bits* story. One serial may deal with the adventures of a modern flapper and the next with the problems of a married woman. Every serial I consider is judged on its merits as a *story*.

"Whether known or unknown, authors have an equal chance of having their work accepted by me for *Tit-Bits*. I am always willing to do everything in my power to encourage all new writers. I am always delighted to give careful consideration to suggestions from new writers. Sometimes, when a story is not quite suitable as planned by the author. I arrange to meet him as often as necessary in order that we can discuss the story together; and I then help him all I can with my own ideas and suggestions.

"If I could find another Hall Caine among the rising generation of writers, I should consider myself very fortunate indeed, as Hall Caine always had a good story to tell.

"It is a fatal mistake for any writer who has as ambition to see a serial of his in such a widely-read paper as *Tit-Bits* to delude himself with the false idea that he has in any way to 'write down' to the public. *Tit-Bits* meets the average intelligent man and woman on their own level, and, in a friendly way, does its best to lift them higher. *Tit-Bits* has high ideals. That is one of the reasons why it is still the most successful of weekly journals, more popular even than it was with past generations.

"Few things annoy me more than the suggestion that to be popular an author has to 'write down.' We don't, as I say, find it necessary to 'write down' to our public. I choose writers who, while appealing to our readers, help to keep the standard of popular fiction high."

—LEONARD CROCOMBE (*in an interview*).

**Thomson-Leng Publications** (12 Fetter Lane, E.C.4).  
Messrs. D. C. Thomson & Co., Ltd., and Messrs. John

Leng & Co. Ltd., Dundee, have many openings for serial stories for daily and weekly newspapers and weekly magazines. British setting is preferred, although good stories with action taking place on the American Continent are acceptable. In all cases the writer should have a real story to tell with an attractive theme, living and understandable characters, handled with sincerity and care. The action should be swift and smooth. Sex stories, fantastic, morbid, and depressing subjects are not acceptable. Stories should be healthy, human and lively. Newspapers accept outstanding stories of romance, adventure, mystery or domestic life with interest well sustained till the end. Magazines want particularly fiction for women readers.

# **THE MAGAZINE STORY**



## THE MAGAZINE STORY

IN any discussion of the short story there is a temptation to separate by definition—as though definitions were of practical importance—the magazine story from the short story as a purely literary form. What *is* a short story? There is a variety of classification to choose from. As well say, what is a novel? Because there are certain types of story which editors buy and certain other types, more easily classifiable, which they never, or very seldom, buy, it does not follow that the accepted stories fall neatly under the heading of magazine fiction any more than the rejected MSS. are entitled to be considered as literature too refined for the mundane fiction market.

As everyone knows, stories are rejected in most cases because they are not worth printing for other people to read; although one constantly meets amateurs consoling themselves for editorial rebuffs by the reflection that their stories are “too good” for the magazines. That such stories are written—although the adjective is debatable—I will not dispute, but rejection by the magazines is usually no more than an indication that the writer is trying to sell his wares in the wrong market.

There is no theory or classification which is likely to be of practical service to the writer or even to influence his work. It may be safely said that none of

the great authors of the past was concerned with definitions of literary forms, and present-day writers should take the hint. Literature is not a science; formulæ are out of place. To become obsessed, as enthusiastic amateurs often do, with rigid classifications of the short story is deliberately to cramp their literary style, and will probably result in complete sterilisation of their creative ability.

Is there such a thing as the art of the short story? I think *John o' London* \* sums up the answer shrewdly: "With the utmost deference I suggest that there is no such art; or rather that the story-teller's art has always been personal to himself, conforming to no rules, and amenable to no criticism except the reader's. This freedom is the life of Fiction. If the story-teller can hold us it is enough; he holds us by his glittering eye. There can be no art of the story because the story must be free or it must perish."

For a particular and restricted market like the magazines it is, however, necessary to conform to type. The editor is the reader whom the writer must please: it is his criticism to which the writer must be primarily amenable. I do not blame young writers for producing stories plainly unsuitable for magazine consumption. That is their own business and no outsider may interfere. But I do blame them—for lack of intelligence and judgment—when they expect the magazines, as they so often do, to print their work regardless of editorial policy and requirements. Admittedly, it is no easy thing for an unprofessional and inexperienced writer to determine whether his work is or is not suitable for the magazines; but it

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\* In *John o' London's Weekly*.



seems to me only reasonable to accept without demur the unanimous verdict of their editors. The point is worth mention, for many young writers allow wounded vanity to obscure the obvious truth that editors know what they want and what they don't want.

To return to definitions. For the serious writer they are practically useless. By the term "serious writer" I mean those who write because they must, without considering beforehand how much money they are going to make out of it. (I hasten to add that the commercially-minded may equally well produce serious literature, but that is another matter.) But nowadays there is a different type of writer altogether; and to cater for this "writing-to-sell" type is comparatively simple.

From all sides come flocking the new recruits to journalism and fiction. It is a writing age. Fostered by almost universal education, nourished by wide, although often superficial, reading, and attracted by the prospect of considerable rewards for comparatively little outlay, new writers take up their pens every day. It is easy to understand the attractions of writing as a hobby or occupation. It requires no capital in the financial sense; it can be experimented with and if successful, carried on as a spare-time occupation; it ministers to the human need, stimulated by conditions of civilised existence, for self-expression; and, commercially, it appears to be a lottery in which almost anyone can win big prizes.

The magnetism of writing may be roughly divided between the prestige and the rewards which await the successful candidate. Generally speaking, the two are to be won together. A few authors are content with the

cash and let the credit go; more numerous, but still relatively few, are the authors whose reputations are more considerable than their incomes.

Whatever their motives, there is no getting away from the fact that increasing numbers of people, of all classes, ages, and of widely varying ability, are daily trying their hand at writing of one sort or another. The field is becoming more and more crowded, with the result that the knowledgeable writer has a pronounced advantage over the amateur. This knowledge is not necessarily to be acquired by the painful knocks of practical experience. It is possible to remain a complete amateur after a lifetime of literary effort.

There is no royal road to literary success. But there is a road which leads, if not to success in its fullest sense, at any rate to a measure of practical recognition which will partially satisfy the demands of literary ambition. To put it more plainly, anyone with the right qualifications can get into print.

What are the qualifications? One hesitates even to generalise, for the most unlikely people succeed. With bricklayers writing poetry, tramps selling their reminiscences, and little girls at school publishing novels, it seems absurd to state a decent education as necessary. I will be bolder still and set down experience of life as another essential. Imagination. A degree of creative ability. A certain amount of skill in the manipulation of words. And, finally, a sense of values.

Mere literary facility is not, to my mind, so very important. Having something to write about is more important than being able to write. The school prodigy who can write endless reams of stuff about nothing may

never produce in a lifetime a single line worth reading. Every editor and publisher is familiar with the arrival of phenomenally bulky manuscripts, technically known inside the office as "bilge" or "tripe." A short story by a Katherine Mansfield is worth more, commercially as well as artistically, than a million words of mediocre outpouring.

The fact is that ease in writing is a stranger to innumerable successful authors. It was Browning, I think, who said that he always sat down at his desk with repulsion and never rose from it without relief. Many famous writers have confessed to a dislike, even a hatred, of the actual labour of writing. A few hundred words a day is literally the most some are capable of, and yet they produce books and stories which make fluent reading. The happy turn of phrase, the easy style—these are not necessarily the product of a swift and flowing pen. More often than not they are the fruit of considerable mental anguish and self-imposed delays.

Thus the amateur who "loves writing" is not justified in regarding himself as a potential man of letters. Rather should he beware of the possibly deceptive facility of his pen. It is worth repeating, having something to write about is more important than being able to write. And this is true commercially as well as artistically.

In the field of magazine fiction it is specially true. No matter how well written a story may be, if it has no theme, or plot, or characterisation of merit, back it will go from editor to author. On the other hand, an indifferently written story with a striking plot, an impressive theme, or even outstandingly good characterisation will often pass muster. Having the choice between

a contributor with ideas and one who could merely write well, no magazine editor would hesitate. Ideas are, as always, at a premium.

I have stressed this relative inferiority of writing ability because I know from experience how many writers penalize themselves by failing to appreciate the superiority of other qualifications. Many amateurs take such great pains over the composition of their stories, erasing an adverb here, inserting an adjective there—in fact crossing their “t’s” and dotting their “i’s” with such infinite care that they lose sight of the more important features of their work. I won’t deny that editors like a well-written story, but it isn’t so important in their eyes—I am speaking of the average editor—as other things. Dog-breeders who prepare their animals for show purposes are well aware that the judges award twice as many points, let us say, for body, legs and feet, as for coat, colour and marking. The short story writer must allow for similar editorial assessment. If I were editing a typical monthly magazine which aimed at supplying entertaining fiction of all kinds, I should, allowing 100 points a story, roughly estimate as follows, in the case of a story which depended for its effect on narrative interest :

|                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Theme and plot                    | 45 points |
| Suspense-interest or construction | 20 points |
| Characterisation                  | 15 points |
| Dialogue                          | 15 points |
| Style                             | 5 points  |

This would not, of course, be an arbitrary scale, but it will serve roughly to express the relative proportions. One cannot deal with fiction on a mathematical basis.

As an editor, if I had submitted to me a story with a good plot badly or clumsily constructed, I would think it worth while asking the author to rewrite it ; but if an exquisitely-written story with no other appeal came to me I doubt whether I would write constructively to the author

I am sadly aware that analysing the short story will not teach the young writer how to produce the saleable thing. It may help him to get the right perspective ; it may reveal the defects in his 'prentice work. That is something, but it is not enough in itself to set the beginner on the right lines

Many well-known authors will tell you that short-story writing is "a knack." I will not take refuge in this evasion. Fully appreciating the difficulties, I nevertheless believe I can point to the most important feature of magazine fiction under present conditions.

We are all familiar with that troubled state of mind which descends upon us when, as sometimes happens, magazine editors return the very story on which we had based the highest hopes. In our modest judgment the story is the best we have ever written. We examine it critically ; it is, we say to ourselves, really a good story. It ought to go. But it doesn't.

It is difficult to say why. The disgruntled author appeals to his friends. They tell him it's a good story. His own opinion thus reinforced, the author tackles fresh markets, and still the result is the same. Again he casts an eye—a despairing eye by this time—over the ill-fated MS. Judged by all the standards he can think of, the story is a good one. The plot is fresh and striking, the characterisation and dialogue up to standard, in

construction there is certainly nothing wrong with it. The climax is the "high spot" of the whole story; in fact, look at it from any critical angle and the enigma remains. But why don't editors buy it?

The trouble usually is that the writer cannot see the wood for the trees. The story may be technically perfect; its various component parts may be separately admirable and the story as a whole beyond reproach. Analysis of this kind is, however, totally deceptive. It is not technical perfection that editors demand, nor sparkling dialogue, nor vivid characterisation, nor a readable style, nor a strong climax. True, they like all these things. But what chiefly guides them in their selection of material is *the standard of the magazine story*.

In other words, the characteristic type. Not the artistically perfect story; not even the good story, unless it fits into the magazine mould. What editors want are stories which—in their judgment—will appeal to their particular public. They want stories of the same pattern which has hitherto found favour with their readers.

*The Pearl of Love*, which H. G. Wells declares to be his favourite among his own short stories, is a good example of the type of story magazine editors do *not* want. It is delightful, but it is not a magazine story. If it had been written and submitted by an unknown author it would have been refused, I venture to say, by most, if not all, present-day magazine editors.

An editor is human—despite legends to the contrary current among beginners—and no doubt admires many of the stories which he returns to their authors. As a rule he is too busy to say so, and it is not his job. Incidentally, some editors of my acquaintance invariably

hesitate to praise the work of an unknown writer which they are nevertheless unable to accept, for the simple reason that their kindness may be repaid by an avalanche of old and mouldy MSS. dug out for their benefit by the eager and gratified author.

But it is not an editor's praise the writer wants. It is his acceptance. And in my experience, editorial decisions are based chiefly on the individual requirements—or what they are considered to be—of the magazine in question.

Recently an editor (one of the best magazine editors in the country) wrote to a leading agent about a certain clever but admittedly tragic story in this vein :

" This story has several tailings ; it is written in a rather dreary style and deals with unpleasant people and it has a tragic ending ; and, as I have pointed out before with great respect, it is almost impossible to get people to pay one shilling for this kind of thing, as they have enough misery in their own lives without buying more."

This editor is no exception. The majority, if not all, would certainly vote for an overwhelming proportion of " happy stories." By which I do not mean stories with merely a happy ending, but stories which, to put it negatively, will not depress their readers. This quality of " happiness " or pleasant atmosphere I would rate as high as any for successful magazine writing, and much higher than most. Action, fluent style, good dialogue and the rest are all-important, but the general theme of the story must be on the right magazine lines, or the story is more likely to fail than to succeed.

One of the reasons why the young writer finds this

hard to understand is his quite frequent discovery of stories with doubtful, even unhappy or wholly tragic, themes in the pages of the popular fiction magazines. What he almost always overlooks is the reputation of the writers. Authors with big names can—more or less—please themselves. They may choose any theme that appeals to them. Editors bow to their choice. They may not, often do not, like it, but what they want is the author's name on their cover. The story is usually a secondary consideration.

It is curious how often the writer with a grievance will ignore the power of an established reputation. Probably many unknown authors secretly encourage themselves with the thought that So-and-So's story (So-and-So being a big gun or an author) is really nothing like so good as one of their own. As a matter of fact, many magazine stories by well-known novelists *are* inferior stuff; and I have no doubt at all that if these inferior stories were submitted by unknown authors they would experience prompt and thoroughly deserved rejection. But that is by the way.

A more fundamental argument is sometimes advanced by unsuccessful writers. They say, in effect: "Editors don't really know what the public wants. They are a lot of sheep, simply following conservative editorial policy and playing for safety. Why don't they experiment and give decent work a chance to reach the public? The public will welcome it if only the stupid editors will show some enterprise and occasionally substitute good work for tripe."

There may be something in this line of argument. But, as I have said before, an editor is human and dreads



a slump in circulation and maybe the consequent loss of his job. Of course he plays for safety. So do most of us. We have to

And the inescapable fact is this: it is editors who pronounce judgment, not the public. They may be right, they may not; but the only satisfactory way of testing the theory that the public do want something better than magazine "entertainment value" is to establish a literary reputation, and then, from one's eminence, to defy editorial dogma and write to please one's own artistic conscience. To put it another way: the unknown or relatively unknown writer must discipline himself in his early days to write conventionally. In detail he can and should, of course, get off the beaten track: conventional plots are not required. But in these, in the kind of story he sits down to write, let him most scrupulously observe orthodox magazine requirements. If he wants to write a weird or gruesome story about one native murdering another in the darkest forests of Central Africa, let him be resigned to editorial refusals. If, however, he can set to work on a jolly story about pleasant people, then his prospects of acceptance are at the outset much higher.

I know how unwise it is to dogmatise about short story themes, but this editorial preference for happy over unhappy themes is a very real thing, and every would-be magazine contributor ought to give it serious consideration. It may make many guineas' worth of difference and in the long run possibly the difference between complete disappointment and a successful literary career.

In emphasising the appeal of "happy" stories I do

no more than provide an indication of editorial preferences. It is not my intention to discourage enterprise and versatility. Every writer experiences at some time or another the "urge" to write an unconventional story. Such stories simply have to be written : one is uncomfortable until they are on paper. Nor do I wish to imply that unusual stories should not be submitted to editors. Once in a while an editor is so much attracted to a story that he puts it into print, however unorthodox it may be. Moreover, if the story is a good one, it will probably arouse the editor's interest. He may ask to see more of the author's work or will give special attention to any future manuscript submitted by that author.

Of all unpopular themes favoured by young writers, the morbid or definitely tragic story easily leads the field. In this context the word " young " may be taken literally. The preoccupation of young people with tragic themes is as curious as it is prevalent.

It is perhaps not difficult to explain why tragedy should attract the young mind. In our early writing it is extremely difficult to write objectively. Our experience of life is limited ; our interest in ourselves is enormous. Childhood has passed ; we have made the discovery that life is a very tragic affair. We are attracted by irony, satire, sarcasm, and all the minor bitternesses of life. To most of us music in minor keys, like that of Greig, then has a strong appeal. We read mournful verse. It is pleasant to be sad.

Mingled with this sadness is the impulse, common to the young, to be destructive. We are not yet wise enough to try to build ; we want to destroy. Like a child who impulsively smashes a doll, we feel we must indulge

the destructive passion. So, in our youthful writing, we are inclined to choose some melancholy theme, prolong the agony of our characters or kill them off with relish.

In later years we become more philosophical. Our vision widens; it is easier to see life as a comedy at which we are content to be onlookers. We are less egotistic, more concerned with the spectacle of life. Our earlier passions and predilections fade away and in retrospect appear extraordinarily insignificant. Our outlook becomes less and less subjective; and, generally speaking, our writing improves. We have acquired perspective and a sense of values; and we have something to write about. We realise that the tragedy that attracted us in our youth was not real tragedy after all, but merely its shadow. We may come to a realisation of true tragedy—the tragedy of Euripides and Shakespeare—when our experience of life is more complete. Real tragedy is not to be appreciated—or written—by the very young.

All this is not so remote from the problem of magazine fiction as it may seem. So often do I meet with youngsters wondering why editors show no appreciation of their literary efforts that it seems worth while examining this tendency towards unsuitable themes. The magazines require sophisticated material of certain easily recognisable types. If the beginner aims at magazine publication, it is his business to study those types and not to expect realisation of his ambition if he ignores editorial standards.

It may be urged that the literary standard of the magazine is a low one, and that writing for the magazines is consequently likely to corrupt if not actually destroy

real literary ability. I do not see why this should be so. The early work of many of our most distinguished writers appeared in popular magazines. Moreover, as I see it, the discipline of conforming to well-defined standards has a very real value. Critics and authors who talk smugly about Art are living in a world of their own. Contemporary judgment is notoriously false. Whatever views we may hold about current literature are subject to ridicule by future generations. The author hailed to-day as a great artist may be condemned by our grandchildren as shoddy; the writer now contemptuously dismissed as a pot-boiler may be crowned with honours a few generations hence.

That art and material success are incompatible is the theory to which unsuccessful authors and disappointed critics fondly subscribe. For them the grapes of "commercial" fiction are sour. The truth of the matter is that writing is neither an art nor a trade. Dean Inge expressed it neatly when he said: "Literature flourishes best when it is half a trade and half an art."

The magazine story need not be a hundred per cent trade product. A work of art can be readable and entertaining. There is a large public appreciative of good work, and although the percentage of artistic stories in the magazines is not high, this is simply because there are not enough artists to go round. A story like Margaret Kennedy's *A Long Week-End* would, I venture to say, have been snapped up by any reasonably intelligent editor regardless of the author's name.

From a practical point of view the pages of the magazines are open to any story with enough entertainment value. To those whose chief concern is to

have their stories published and to receive payment for them I can offer honest encouragement. Although magazine standards are steadily being raised, I consider it a relatively easy thing to get one's stories into print.

I repeat the qualifications. First, the writer must be able to tell a story (and this is not quite so simple as it sounds). He must have imagination, perhaps not very much, he must be able to manipulate words; and finally, he must be able to appreciate what is and what is not the kind of story required, and to put that appreciation into practice.

It really is not very formidable. The mere fact that one is attracted to the prospect of writing fiction is often (although not always) an indication of latent ability. To want to write is the first step on the road. Without the elementary qualifications I have outlined progress cannot be expected, but I honestly believe that the average intelligent young man or woman, with some story-telling inclination, is capable of the job.

When I first began to make a study of the magazine story I was much impressed by the number of published stories which revealed nothing but craftsmanship (and sometimes not much of that) and, for want of a better word, readableness. It was, in fact, rather a shock to discover that to get into print called for no real literary ability. I had much the same sort of shock, if I may be forgiven an extraneous personal reminiscence, when I met my first sub-editor in Fleet Street. I was new to the job, frightfully anxious to learn, and secretly terrified of this all-important and experienced person under whose wing I was placed. I began to feel that my education was hopelessly bungled, that I knew nothing

ever likely to be of the slightest use to me. I sat shivering one cold Monday morning waiting to be initiated.

It took me several weeks to recover from the shock. The sub-editor in charge of my immediate destiny not only could not speak the King's English; he could neither write nor spell it! My first introduction to his methods was watching him correct proofs with the aid of a well-thumbed dictionary. When he discovered I could save him (usually) the trouble of consulting the dictionary, I was welcome. We ran an "Answers to Correspondents" page in that little weekly, and I remember a reader's letter asking for some information about William Makepeace Thackeray. My sub-editor thought he was a professional footballer! (This may seem fantastic, but it is true.) But he rarely made a mistake; he never failed to verify his references. He was, as a matter of fact, one of the best sub-editors I have ever come across. He would cut up columns of type as an expert butcher can chop meat. He was a mine of information on the domestic subjects in which our paper specialised; and he was an infallible judge of the type of article and story our readers enjoyed. And he knew exactly how to handle the recalcitrant printers.

Few people outside the little world of papers and magazines realise how much more important are such qualifications than the mere ability to write academically good English. Many of the regular contributors to the magazines would not be admitted to membership of suburban literary societies. I know, and respect, many people who, in spite of being almost illiterate, earn their livings by writing. I know one man who makes £1,500 a year writing serials and short stories for the cheap fiction

weeklies." I know another man whose home is the work-house when he is not elsewhere, and whose chief interest in life is something more liquid than literature. This man has produced some quite excellent stuff, including one well-reviewed novel. It is a curious world, this of pen-and-ink.

But to return to the magazine story in particular.

The most effective method of learning and improving one's short story technique lies in the examination and analysis of published stories. The beginner is frequently exhorted to study the magazines: and I am afraid that this well-meant advice is usually interpreted in the wrong way. Reading published work will certainly give any intelligent person an idea of editorial requirements, but that is all. In order to appreciate the problems and difficulties which beset the writer it is necessary to probe beneath the surface. The finished product must be carefully examined if one is to observe the mechanism concealed within and realise how the author obtained his effects. A printed story is like a house in the distance. It is visible as a whole, but in order to discover how it has been built it is necessary to inspect the rooms within, the walls, the space allotted to various features, the size and nature of the foundations, the bricks and mortar, and so on. Even so, there is much which is invisible and must be taken for granted.

There is, moreover, the danger that the inexperienced writer will choose for examination the wrong type of story. It is not always possible for the amateur to distinguish between stories of merit and stories published chiefly because of the authors' names. Most people are aware that stories by famous novelists are sometimes (the cynic will say often) printed regardless of their magazine

qualities, and I will not dwell on this tendency. I will merely point out the desirability of avoiding "big-name" stories in choosing subjects for analysis.

Having come to the conclusion that writing for the magazines did not present insuperable difficulties, I resolved some years ago to test my theory. I had met many writers of fiction and found most of them quite ordinary. Incidentally, I met a few whose picturesque appearance was no indication of their achievements or ability. I analysed some hundreds of stories. I frequently talked with successful magazine contributors, discussed with them their methods and their ideas. But what I wanted was raw material: someone who had never tried his hand at the short story; someone of just average ability with no special flair for fiction writing. There was nothing for it but to experiment on myself.

If the rest of this chapter is egotistical, I hope I may be forgiven. My own short stories are the *raison d'être* of this book. I wrote them partly to prove my theory, and partly—I must admit—because I wanted to add to my income. I have no illusions about these stories. I am not sorry I wrote them, nor is there one which I can honestly say I am proud to have written. Moreover, the stories which appear in the following pages have been chosen, not by any means because they are the best of the many I have written, but simply because they seem to me to cover a fairly wide range of type. They comprise one or two humorous stories, a "problem" story, a couple of racing yarns, an armistice-day story, a character study, and a mystery story. At least two stories with doubtful magazine themes are included, for the encouragement of the unconventionally-minded. To some extent they are



representative of an equally wide range of publication : from a popular twopenny weekly to what most people would call a " highbrow " quarterly.

I took up short-story writing as another man will take up stamp-collecting or fretwork—as a hobby. I have no peculiar ability for fiction, and I have little imagination. I am (I think) too practical-minded. I wrote merely what I thought I could sell ; and that I am not at any rate far wrong in this respect is demonstrated by the fact that, with one exception, I have sold every story I have written. I am afraid this may seem a boast, but it is not meant boastfully. I only make the statement to justify my expressed belief that anyone who sets his mind to it can also produce what editors want.

In the ordinary way I should not have dreamed of trying to get these stories published in book form. They are a long way from being good enough, and no sensible publisher would offer to print them. But if they serve as some indication of the possibilities of the magazine fiction market, and, more particularly, of the prospects of the newcomer to this field, they will have fulfilled the purpose for which they are intended. I have added a few notes after each story, describing its genesis and development ; dealing with some of the technical problems which confronted me in its writing ; and mentioning various points which may be of interest to the student of magazine fiction. If any ambitious beginner puts this book down, saying to himself, " Well, I can write stuff as good as that," my feelings will not be hurt. On the contrary, I shall be content, for it is the chief aim of this book to encourage others to go and do likewise, only to do it much better.

## A SPLASH OF PUBLICITY \*

Is there anything more depressing than being an unsuccessful artist? If you happen to know one, ask him and see what he says. His studio is probably full of the mute evidences of his failure. He hasn't the courage to destroy his unappreciated efforts. And as a rule he lacks the means to escape from their depressing influence by renting another studio.

Whatever Charlie Potts may have been, he certainly was unsuccessful. Of course, his name told against him. In vain the bold signature CHARLES POTTS adorned painting after painting. No one wanted to buy them. In fact, no one liked them, with one exception—who deserves the next paragraph all to herself. His friends insisted on calling him Charlie, treating his pictures with familiar disrespect, and preferring to talk instead about racing, food, and other more important matters.

Only one person believed in Charles. That was Marigold. Marigold was his wife, and a very pretty, delightful wife she was. Charles has always said she was much too good for him, and as a friend of Charles I am inclined to agree with him. There was nothing especially noticeable about Marigold, except that she was attractive in a slim, graceful fashion, which somehow suggested

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\* Published in the *Strand Magazine*.

initiative and determination. She didn't really look at all masterful, but you were conscious that if she had set her heart on something she would get that something in the end.

So that it was just as well for dear, easy-going Charlie that Marigold had made up her mind that he *must* succeed. Charlie had the relic of a war pension, luckily, but Marigold knew that something would have to be done soon, for three people cannot live on the fag-end of a pension. Two could, and did manage, with the aid of lots of laughter and youthful philosophy. But Petal would need more than that, reflected Marigold. She hoped it would be a girl, did Marigold, as she had made up her mind to call her Petal. Marigold was like that.

One fine morning, when the warm September sun filtered pleasantly through the trees, Marigold tackled the unsuccessful artist in earnest.

"Charles dear, you must listen," she said.

Charles took the pipe out of his mouth and assumed the expression of an obedient but quite virtuous house dog.

"If you don't sell some pictures soon," she said, "we—shall—be—broke. Something's got to be done. Ever since the war you've been painting and you haven't sold a single, solitary picture."

"I know," said Charles gloomily. "Don't rub it in."

"But, darling"—patiently—"other people sell heaps and"—loyally—"their work isn't a third as good as yours."

Charles brightened momentarily, then relapsed into melancholy.

"They get publicity," he said. "Sell anything with publicity nowadays."

He puffed away at his battered pipe, satisfied to have uttered such a profound truth. For a few moments Marigold watched the sun dancing on the waters of the river beneath. Then she thoughtfully tidied her cushions

"Publicity," she said; "publicity——"

"You're going to have an idea," said Charles, from experience. "Let's hope it's nothing strenuous."

"It is, Charles dear. *You* must have publicity; we must invent a *stunt*."

"A stunt?" echoed Charles, genuinely alarmed. He knew Marigold.

"Yes, dear," said Marigold patiently. "Let me think."

And Marigold sat down determinedly and thought, while Charles strenuously puffed away at his pipe, hoping for the best.

"I can bear the suspense no longer," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "From the light in your eye I can see I am in for it. What is it this time?"

Marigold held up her hand.

"You are going to be drowned," she announced.

"What?"

"Drowned. At least, rescued from drowning."

"I'm not," said Charles firmly.

Marigold surveyed him with affectionate toleration.

"For my sake, Charles dear, you will. It's really a brilliant idea. You will fall into the river and I will shriek for help. Someone's bound to jump in after you, and when you're rescued——"

"Supposing I'm not rescued?" interrupted Charles.

"You will be. Everybody always is. You're a splendid swimmer, so there's no danger. And when you're pulled out of the water, there will, of course, be crowds of newspaper reporters. I will deal with them. Think of the headlines, Charles! 'Artist Rescued from the Thames.' 'Beautiful Young Wife's Story.'"

"And how," said Charles, "is that going to help us?"

"Publicity," said Marigold triumphantly. "Publicity. You said so yourself. And you must wear your oldest suit of clothes," she added as an afterthought.

Charles groaned. He knew objections would be futile. They always were with Marigold. He most certainly was in for it.

And so, some days later, dutifully dressed in his most ancient suit, which was, as he pointed out to Marigold, exactly the same as his third best Charles Potts fell into the river. The bridge they chose shall be nameless, for this is a story about publicity, and the Thames bridges have had quite enough publicity recently.

It was a warm day; Charles had insisted on that, at least. They had carefully rehearsed everything in the studio. Anyone passing who had troubled to look at them standing against the parapet would have seen a young man in a shabby suit with a quite realistically worried expression and an attractive girl looking, now it had come to the point, decidedly pale. However, as it happened, no one took the slightest notice of them. The agitated conversation which they had planned reduced itself to brief but pointed observations on the part of Charles.

"It's a long drop," he said, casting an anxious eye over the parapet.

"You're not going to back out of it now, Charles?" said Marigold, half hoping he would.

"No." He looked round, taking his bearings. "Well, here goes, old thing!"

And, as our old-fashioned novelists love to put it, in less time than it takes to tell, Charles vaulted on to the parapet and jumped headlong into the river.

Marigold's scream was perfectly genuine. For a brief second she heartily wished they hadn't undertaken such a crazy adventure. But the sight of Charles's head bobbing on the surface of the water beneath somehow reassured her. If he had not seemed so very far away, she could have sworn he flashed a grin up at her before submerging in accordance with their plan.

This suddenly recalled her own prearranged rôle. Without further ado she clung to the parapet in a tolerable imitation of a half-fainting condition and began to shriek hoarsely for help.

There was really no need to shriek, for, attracted by her scream and the resounding splash Charles had made on entering the water, a fair-sized crowd had already collected around her and was increasing with extraordinary rapidity.

Out of the corner of her eye, at which she was dabbing furiously with an absurdly small pocket-handkerchief, Marigold observed with dismay that the interest displayed by the spectators was, to say the least of it, casual.

One elderly female stood by her side, peering morbidly at the river.

"Pore feller!" she said, with obvious relish. "Never see 'im no more."

Others struggled eagerly for favourable observation posts. But with a sinking heart it dawned on Marigold that no one was going to make any attempt at a rescue.

Supposing Charles had been unable to swim, and had really fallen in! Marigold suddenly flamed into passion at the thought.

She swung round and faced the crowd.

"Isn't there a man among you?" she cried. "Won't someone go in after him?"

"It's no good, miss," said the voice of the disreputable female at her elbow. "Talk about men! They're a shockin' lot nowadays. Now if *I* was a man——"

Someone in the crowd laughed. Marigold burst into tears—real tears this time. She felt ashamed. A hundred thoughts raced through her mind at once. What would Charles say? He wouldn't care, anyhow, if their scheme failed. He would just change his clothes, grin, and light his pipe. That would be much worse than reproaches, she thought bitterly. And this horrible crowd of people! How she longed to get away! Then she caught sight of a policeman's helmet and the remnants of her courage vanished. What would happen now?

Quite suddenly an inquiring voice, a strong, compelling voice, pierced through the murmur. It was followed an instant later by a tall, athletic man vigorously elbowing a passage through the crowd. He reached Marigold's side just as Charles was patiently reappearing on the surface of the water, to all appearances a drowning man.

The stranger took in the situation at a glance, and, to the accompaniment of vociferous cheers from the small boys and half-hearted applause from the others, stepped

on to the parapet, glanced swiftly downwards, and, ignoring Marigold's outstretched hand, dived to the rescue.

Marigold's mind subconsciously registered the fact that he was well dressed and extremely good-looking. It suddenly struck her that his clothes would be completely ruined and she felt horribly mean. But she could not disguise her relief that something had turned up to save the situation.

"Exac'ly like one of them Orstralians, ain't he?" the old woman said admiringly. "What I call a proper gentleman. Now if——"

Her wheezy voice was drowned by the clamour of the crowd as it was seen that the stranger had seized the struggling figure in the water below and was steadily propelling him towards the shore.

"My! Ain't 'e a fine swimmer?" cried one of the small boys shrilly. "And wiv 'is clothes on an' all!"

As the figure in the water drew in closer, the crowd began to make hastily for the steps which led down to the river's bank, and Marigold hurried in the same direction.

Somebody cried: "Make way for the young lidy!" And Marigold was thrust forward as Charles was in the act of being unceremoniously hauled up on to the river's bank. There was now no lack of willing helpers and the crowd surged round the two dripping figures as if determined to miss none of the excitement.

"Stand back there!" ordered the stranger, a dignified figure in spite of his soaked garments. Even the two policemen who now officiously pushed their way forward



seemed to acknowledge the ring of authority in his voice and began to push the crowd back. The stranger proceeded to run an expert eye over the recumbent Charles, who was loyally doing his best to simulate complete exhaustion.

Marigold bent hastily over Charles. A glance satisfied her that all was well. So far, she thought triumphantly, everything had gone according to plan.

But where were the newspaper reporters? Anxiously she made a rapid survey of the seedy onlookers. Not one looked in the least like a reporter. Once more panic seized her.

Her hopes revived at a movement on the outskirts of the crowd. The newcomer, a clean-shaven man in horn-rimmed glasses, proved to be a doctor.

Marigold was getting desperate. She was just giving up hope altogether when suddenly two men emerged from the crowd and one produced a notebook from his hip-pocket.

The elder of the two men put out a restraining hand.

"Put it away, son," he said. "There isn't a story here. It's only another darn fool attempt at suicide. Let's get on."

Marigold nearly collapsed. Fate was against her. It really was too bad.

The tall stranger, who had divested himself of his coat and was methodically wringing water out of it, nodded to the doctor and began to speak to her. He had a pleasant voice, with a slightly American accent. She only dimly realised that he was trying to assure her that Charles would be all right if he were taken straight

home, rubbed down with a dry towel, and put to bed. She failed altogether to notice his puzzled smile and his quick glance in the direction of her wedding ring.

Then, amazingly, the young man with the notebook pointed suddenly in the direction of the group and whispered something excitedly to his companion.

For a second the other looked incredulous. Then his expression underwent a complete change. He strode hastily forward.

"Excuse me, Mr. Brigadayne," he said pleasantly.

The stranger swung round on his heel.

"What the——" he began. Then he laughed as if there was something funny about it after all.

Her attention absorbed by this strange development, Marigold became aware just in time that the doctor and policemen between them were removing the faintly protesting Charles in the direction of the road. Someone shouted distantly for a taxi.

This would never do. She turned to the newspaper men.

"They're taking him away!" she cried. "I'm his wife. Aren't you going to——"

Her voice died away. The two reporters, one on each side of "Mr. Brigadayne," were scribbling away furiously, no longer aware of her existence. Tears of mortification came into her eyes.

It flashed upon her. Of course Mr. Brigadayne—the famous Hubert Brigadayne, known to millions of film "fans" the whole world over as the hero of a thousand daring exploits on the screen.

In that moment she hated Mr. Hubert Brigadayne with an awful intensity. Why couldn't he have stayed

in California, or wherever it was that film stars performed, instead of coming to spoil her carefully-laid plans like this? As if Hubert Brigadayne hadn't had enough publicity already! It was a disgusting trick to play on her. She determined to make one last effort.

"Don't interrupt, miss, please," said one of the newspaper men without looking up.

"Stop!" broke in the voice of Hubert Brigadayne firmly. "I won't answer any more questions. I want to talk to this young lady. And I'm cold and wet, and want to be left alone."

The two journalists stepped back to avoid the sweep of his wet-sleeved arm. Hubert Brigadayne seized Marigold by the shoulder and hurried her forward in the direction of the retreating crowd.

Before Marigold could recover from her surprise the celebrated film actor had steered her rapidly past the onlookers, bundled her into a taxi which had drawn up beside the kerb, dismissed the doctor and the policemen, asked her address, given rapid instructions to the driver, got in beside her, and slammed the door.

The sudden jerk of the starting taxi-cab precipitated Charles on the floor. He sat up and regarded Marigold and the newcomer with a whimsical smile.

"I'm infernally cold," he said. "Of all the ghastly frosts——" He broke off abruptly. "I mean, it was very decent of you to jump in after me."

There was a long pause. Charles and his rescuer simultaneously began to shiver. The celebrated film actor stared hard at Charles.

Marigold broke the silence.

"My husband, Charles," she said absently. "Mr. Hubert Brigadayne."

"I guess we're going to have a nice long talk," said Mr. Brigadayne pleasantly. "But some dry clothes first."

Half an hour later Charles, in spite of vigorous protests, was put to bed. Marigold and Brigadayne were sitting in front of a cheerful fire in the studio, Brigadayne looking like an overgrown schoolboy in an old tweed jacket and flannel trousers belonging to Charles.

"A hot drink makes a whale of a difference, doesn't it?" smiled the film star, putting down his teacup. "It's given me courage to ask you a question. Why did your husband fall in the river?"

Marigold hesitated—and was lost. In a few breathless sentences she told the truth.

Hubert Brigadayne, who had listened in sympathetic silence, waved aside her contrite apology.

"I was glad to get back to my job," he said, with a stray smile which indicated that his thoughts were elsewhere. "Now, publicity's just a fine idea. You leave it to me. Before I go I'd like to look over some of these pictures, if I may."

In the few minutes before his departure, Marigold, feeling, as she told Charles afterwards, a very poor body of troops, did her best to make the sincerity of her apologies evident. But Hubert Brigadayne insisted on treating the whole thing as a joke. He admired Charles's pictures, told her, with a twinkle in his eye, to give the invalid hot bread and milk and keep him between two blankets for twenty-four hours, and finally departed, still wearing Charles's incongruous garments, in a hastily summoned taxi.

"And that's that," said Marigold ruefully.

But it wasn't.

Arrived safely at his hotel, which he discreetly entered by the back way, Hubert Brigadayne hurriedly divested himself of his unfamiliar clothing, put on a flowered-silk dressing-gown, and devoted energetic attention to the telephone receiver in his bedroom. He put down the receiver with a chuckle.

"I'm sorry, Maisie," he said enigmatically, to no one in particular, "but I guess it's got to be done."

The following morning the fun began. When she first saw the headlines Marigold whooped with joy. Then for a moment she thought it was a huge practical joke. Even Charles, looking over Marigold's shoulder, dropped his pipe in astonishment.

In large black type these were the headlines that met their astounded eyes :

FAMOUS FILM STAR RESCUES YOUNG ARTIST  
HUBERT BRIGADAYNE IN ENGLAND  
SENSATIONAL DIVE INTO THAMES

Beneath, punctuating a long column of type, appeared photographs of Hubert Brigadayne—and Charles.

"Well, I'm——" began Charles.

"That photograph!" cried Marigold in the same instant. "He must have taken it while I got the taxi."

But the real surprise was yet to come. They read eagerly what the newspaper had to say about it all. After a graphic description of the rescue and a brief reference to Hubert Brigadayne's famous career, there

followed an interview with Hubert Brigadayne at his hotel.

" . . . but the distinguished film actor refused to talk about himself.

" ' I have always been keenly interested in art,' he declared. ' This young artist is a discovery, and I claim the credit for it. I have already bought three of his pictures and am confident that true connoisseurs of art will follow suit. In fact, I am so impressed by his work that I am losing no time in arranging for an exhibition of his pictures, which will be held in the very near future.' "

" Holy smoke ! " said Charles eloquently.

The newspaper slid from Marigold's fingers. She felt that she wanted to put her head on Charles's shoulder and laugh and cry together.

A sudden ring at the studio bell brought them sharply back to earth.

Marigold opened the door. Two men (" I *knew* they were reporters ! " declared Marigold triumphantly, afterwards) and a special messenger boy, carrying a bulky parcel, stood on the doorstep.

She signed for the parcel and, while the two newspaper men fired questions at Charles, opened it.

It contained Charles's trousers and tweed jacket, and a letter. Marigold slit it open, and a cheque fell out.

" I hope you will forgive me," she read, " but I really do admire your husband's work, and these are the three pictures I want, to begin with. . . . "

There was only one sentence Marigold couldn't understand. In fact, neither she nor Charles—who is now so prosperous that Marigold is always scolding him about his pipe—has ever been able to understand it.

This was the sentence : " It's an ill wind that blows no one any good."

But I think you ought to know what Hubert Brigadayne meant.

Before sending his Thames-soaked suit to be cleaned—for Hubert Brigadayne, unlike some film stars, was a sensible fellow—he turned out the pockets. From one of them he drew a letter, addressed to Mrs. Hubert Brigadayne, somewhere in California, sealed and stamped, and ready to be posted.

But alas! The muddy Thames had done its work.

He opened it slowly and re-read what he had written the morning before. Most of it concerns nobody but Mrs. and Mr. Hubert Brigadayne, but on the third page he had written .

" . . . and not a soul knows I am in London. I can't tell you how delightful it is to be for once out of the limelight you know I detest so much. It's a real holiday, no interviews, no publicity. . . ."

" The joke's on me," he murmured, as he tore up the letter and threw it into the fire.

### *Notes on " A Splash of Publicity "*

The extravagant publicity sought after by certain film stars probably suggested this story—I am not sure. It is of course impossible to trace the exact sequence of one's ideas ; but the sad case of a film star who didn't want publicity and got it was undoubtedly the mental foundation of " A Splash of Publicity."

To shape this rough idea into a short story pattern, I hunted, probably subconsciously, for a likely plot. Obviously the plot had to be capable of light, even frivolous treatment. The first

constructive step was made when, following a familiar O. Henry device, it occurred to me to balance my publicity-avoiding film star with a publicity-seeking someone. Who should that someone be? It had to be someone young, whom publicity would help. That dismissed doctors, lawyers and so on. An actress? Not enough contrast to the film star. A writer? Overdone. An artist? Also overdone in magazine fiction, but certainly a better choice.

And so the plot evolved. Chelsea—where all good (magazine fiction) artists live—suggested the river Thames, and the Thames suggested the "stunt" of falling into the water in order to be rescued. Other details began to fall into their places, and the plot crystallised.

At this stage—before a word had been put on paper—I had considerable mental reservations about the plot. In my experience one hits on a plot, or laboriously builds one together, only to find when the actual writing of the story begins that certain adjustments have to be made; ideas abandoned, fresh ones substituted; characters removed, new characters introduced; in fact, the whole machinery of the plot is liable to drastic alteration. The point is, I think, worth mention, for it is a common mistake of beginners to stick too closely to their original plots. Be prepared to modify your plot when you put the story on paper is advice which most young writers will find useful.

As it happened, this story more or less faithfully followed the original outline. One of the most important problems which confront the short-story writer is the problem of sequence. To solve this I suggest it is a good plan mentally to separate (1) what the reader must or may be told, (2) what must be withheld until a certain point of the story. In this instance, the story clearly had to begin with the introduction of Charles and Marigold and their circumstances, and the birth of their bright idea. It was equally clear that Hubert Brigadayne must be kept in the background. The revelation of his identity had to be a surprise to the reader as well. But the essential point—Brigadayne's dislike and attempted avoidance of publicity—had to be kept for the very end of the story, to give it a twist.

I chose the direct method of telling the story; it seemed the



easiest. In describing the crowd watching the ostensibly drowning man, I made use of a familiar newspaper report—a crowd of onlookers, and no one attempting a rescue. The actual narrative was straightforwardly written. I don't think I altered more than a few sentences.

Before uncovering my typewriter—this story was typed straight on to paper—I realised that if I could not make it really amusing, the story at any rate had to have a certain lightness of touch. This atmosphere I tried to create in the opening paragraph (which is feeble). Hence also the various sprinklings of humour with which I tried to adorn the tale. I deliberately aimed at a “jolly” story, knowing that this type finds favour among editors. At the same time I tried to make the action brisk. The story had to be kept moving.

A few minor details may be worth mention. Charles's pipe (mentioned five times) is a stock device; it helps to “fix” Charles in the reader's mind. The disreputable old woman in the crowd is not essential to the story, but she helps the action along and supplies a touch of humour as a contrast to Marigold's agitation. The title (perhaps I ought not to lump this in with the minor details) gave me a lot of trouble. My original title was “There is a Tide,” but I dismissed it as too solemn and pretentious. I finally decided on “A Splash of Publicity” because I could think of nothing better.

The first magazine to which I offered the story rejected it. The editor (incidentally a friend) commented on it as follows:

“I am afraid it is too slight for me . . . also there have been so many promising young artists with affectionate wives about to add to the population to both of whom some stroke of luck always arrives in the nick of time. Could you not send me something more wicked and thrilling?”

I then sent it to the *Strand*, whose editor liked it. Since English publication, it has been sold in Germany and Scandinavia.

## "C'EST LA GUERRE" \*

It was by mere chance that Sherwood turned into the Long Bar that July evening and encountered Tommy Brett. They had not seen each other since Paschendaele.

"Hal-lo! Sherwood, by all that's holy!" Tommy greeted him uproariously. "Scotch?—and soda? Good. Let's have a look at you. Still the same gloomy devil, I'll bet."

Sherwood smiled a rare smile. He and the irrepressible Tommy had always been good pals in the old days.

"Where've you been all these donkey's years?" said Tommy, steering the drinks.

"Assam—tea-planting," said Sherwood briefly. "Here's fun."

They drank. Tommy grinned reminiscently.

"Remember Zillebeke Lake? And that comic dug-out with the corrugated tin roof that the wind nearly blew off? The good old days, what!"

"Yes," said Sherwood absently. "Perhaps." He looked around him. "My first day in London for ten years. Odd I should run across you here, in this, of all places. Seems different now."

They fell silent. Both remembered the joyous crowded days of leave in the war, when the place was packed suffocatingly full of officers of all ranks and regiments. A great meeting-place then, it had been. And both were thinking of the good fellows who used to frequent the place and would frequent it no more. There are ghosts—ghosts in khaki and Sam Browne belts—in the Long Bar now, or there ought to be.

"I dropped in here for old times' sake," Sherwood was saying.

"Have another on the strength of it," said Tommy.

"My turn. Same again?"

Tommy nodded. "Remember Reeves? Married now, and three kids. Fancy old Reeves with three kids!"

"What's happened to Gordon?" asked Sherwood. His thoughts were drifting back to the past. How long ago it all seemed.

"Gordon . . ." said Tommy. "Didn't you hear? Of course not, you've been stewing abroad. He shot himself, poor devil. He never was right, you know, after that last show. Too badly smashed up."

Sherwood nodded, and changed the subject. They talked of the wartime years, years which in retrospect recalled mostly the cheerful and amusing side of that great adventure. They were unconscious of memory's obliteration of the monotony, the hardships and the perils. Danger and discomfort are soon forgotten; only the heroism and the glory survive, to tempt a new generation into the futility of war.

They talked on, more soberly, of the men who had gone. Men like Francis Dugdale, killed on the muzzle of the German machine-gun which with his last dying

movement he bombed out of action : men like Gordon—casualties of the Great Peace.

"There's Curtis, too," said Tommy, sipping thoughtfully at his drink. "A good chap if ever there was one. Couldn't get a job, no sort of a job at all. I met him one day. It was awful."

"What's happened to him?"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders.

"Curtis was always a proud devil, you know that. I wanted to help him a little. But he wouldn't take it. Not that sort of help, he said. He wanted a job. I haven't seen him since. I wrote to him," he went on, a trifle shamefacedly. "Told him to call on me, you know. But he never replied."

"The Great War," said Sherwood, with a soft bitterness.

"I know. But we had some good times all the same. Remember the Château near the cathedral at Arras? That was a good billet if you like. At least, until the Boche made himself unpleasant. Wonder what's become of the old Comtesse. And that pretty girl, her niece, or something. Yvonne. Remember her?"

"I remember," said Sherwood. He suddenly laid his hand on the other's arm, paused for a moment, then went on: "Tommy, I've got an idea."

Tommy stared in mild surprise at Sherwood's unusual animation.

"Cough it up. I'm listening," he said.

"Will you be in town, or available in November?" demanded Sherwood abruptly.

"Why, yes . . ."

"Well, then, couldn't we—you and I and Curtis

—and Reeves if he'll come—all go and see the Comtesse on Armistice day? I'll write to her first of course, to make sure she's there. What do you say?"

"I'm on," said Tommy promptly. "It's a capital idea. But I'm not sure about Curtis, you know."

"I'll look after that," said Sherwood. "Give me his address. I'll leave you to fix it with Reeves."

It was late when they separated.

"We'll forgather again soon," said Tommy enthusiastically.

Sherwood nodded. "You won't forget this trip of ours to France?"

"You bet not. I'm all in favour of it."

They shook hands on it and parted.

Stairs creaked that morning in the Château d'Arblay with unusual animation. Ordinarily they creaked at anyone's approach, for they were old and badly worn. But then everything in the Château was old and badly worn—except Yvonne.

On this bright autumn morning she ran lightly upstairs, causing the ancient boards to creak in lively sympathy with her mood.

"Maman," she called softly. "A letter. A letter from England."

The Comtesse d'Arblay appeared suddenly at the top of the stair, leaning on her ebony stick, her eyes bright with interest. If a shade of apprehension lingered for a moment, Yvonne did not see it.

"Not a letter—from England?"

"*Mais si, Maman.* Here it is."

The old lady groped her way with creditable activity

through the folding doors to her old high-backed chair. Yvonne offered her arm, only to have it thrust scornfully aside.

"How many times am I to remind you," said the Comtesse d'Arblay, "that I do not need your help? Am I already aged and infirm?"

She sat down and opened the letter. Her keen eyes closely scanned the written pages. The envelope slipped unheeded to the faded carpet, but Yvonne knelt and picked it up, holding it to her breast.

"So he writes—at last, this Englishman of yours. Look at me, child! Why must you turn away? See, he asks news of you."

The old lady stood up, her hands clasped on the top of the ebony stick.

"If you read," she said impatiently. "you will see why he has not written to you, little fool. He asks my hospitality, he and his comrades." She drew herself up proudly. "They shall be well entertained." She turned her back on Yvonne and crossed to the cabinet which contained the greatest of the d'Arblay treasures. Gravely she regarded the crystal perfection of the old goblets. Generation after generation of the d'Arblays had jealously safeguarded the priceless old glasses.

Yvonne raised her eyes from the letter. "But, Maman," she said sadly, "how can we? We cannot afford it."

The Comtesse appeared not to hear.

"They were Jean's comrades," she said, softly. "One will arrange it."

She turned suddenly, almost savagely, on Yvonne. "It is easy to see you are not my child. You have no

spirit, no pride. You are no d'Arblay." She paused on the threshold of the door. "Jean was at least spared a fool for a wife." With an indignant twitch at her stiff skirt she hobbled out.

Yvonne, holding the letter in her hand, looked after her with tears in her eyes.

"Poor Maman," she said.

She turned back to the letter. It was truly from Alan Sherwood. How stiffly he asked how she was! Again and again she read the formal phrase, trying to detect an underlying anxiety. But she could not expect him otherwise, after all these years, and writing to her guardian, too. How could she? At any rate she would see him again. She began to reckon how long it was to November.

She straightened her dress and crossed to look at herself in the cheval mirror. She saw a thin, pale, dark-haired woman with wistful eyes. She smiled and changed into a girl, young and delicately beautiful. If only she were not so thin! And this black frock!

She ran upstairs to change it. In her own room she began to cry. Madame la Comtesse might send her away. It would be cruel, but she was cruel, sometimes. But what was the use of sending her away? Jean was dead, she could not marry Jean after all. . . .

Ten years, more than ten years ago. Her cousin Jean, young, handsome, upright, home on leave before joining his regiment. How proud his mother had been! A veritable d'Arblay, she had called him. And Jean had smiled, knowing there was no greater praise for him than this. And pretty little Yvonne. . . . Of course it was always understood that they should be betrothed. Even Madame la Comtesse was tolerant, for though Yvonne was

only remotely a d'Arblay, she was better than a stranger. And in those days, Yvonne now thought sadly, she had liked her. The war, how cruel it was ! It had swallowed up Jean, and her own father ; it had changed Jean's mother ; it had brought them all to poverty, so that she had lived empty ever since.

Only now, in this unexpected revival of old memories, was she beginning to realise how bleak and numbing her life had been in this old house for the past ten years. Up to now, it had not seemed so bad. She had a duty, after all, to Jean's mother, more so as she was her legal parent ; and if they were poor, well, there were others far worse afflicted in these post-war years. It was not pleasant to live hungry. When one was sometimes hungry for food, that could be endured ; one got thin, but what would you ? But there were more serious hungers, only vaguely realised, when young blood stirred uneasily in revolt, only to be suppressed by habit and discipline and prayer.

And now it seemed that Alan Sherwood had not forgotten. How well she remembered that tall, unsmiling young Englishman ! She had forgotten everything but the names of all the others who in those bygone days had been quartered at the Château. She remembered them as a gay, care-free procession of officers, mostly very young subalterns to whom war was an adventure and a jest. All enormously appreciative of the comfort of the Château after some of the billets they had had. Going up to the line, coming back from it, they were always the same cheerful crowd.

But Alan Sherwood was different. He always had been—well, *sérieux*. He had never tried to flirt with her. He had liked her from the beginning, she knew that. For



herself, unresponsive as she invariably was with the others, she had set herself out to make him smile. And he had sternly resisted, or so it seemed. That had been on account of Jean. He knew all about Jean, as they all did; Madame la Comtesse had seen to that. But then when the news of Jean's death came through . . .

That evening remained vivid in her memory. A battalion of infantry was billeted in the village, and as usual the Château was crowded with its officers. They were new, and, judged by earlier standards, a little noisy. Madame la Comtesse had fortunately gone to bed when the telegram arrived. A gramophone was playing, voices were singing and shouting

"Do not stop them," Jean's mother had said. "It does not matter. Nothing matters."

And Yvonne had crept out, into the welcoming blackness of the night, and had wept bitterly. Not for Jean, but for Sherwood, who was not with her, for the same fate might befall him.

Then, that enchanting day when he rode over on forty-eight hours' leave to press her hand in sympathy. He had of course presented himself first to the Comtesse, but it was she, Yvonne, whom he had come to see. She knew it, and her heart sang. Yet he was absolutely *comme il faut*. How impersonal these English can be! She had only seen him alone for a few minutes, but she knew then that he loved her. He had said nothing, but she knew.

Afterwards, the Armistice signed, he had come again. This time on leave from hospital, his arm in a sling. How her heart had melted when she saw him, bandaged and pale! And how afraid she had been when the door of Madame la Comtesse's room closed behind him. . . .

And with reason. She knew exactly what had happened at that interview.

"Ah! . . . Captain Sherwood. Good morning, *mon capitaine*."

"How are you, Madame?"

(And more polite preliminaries.) Then:

"It's about Yvonne."

Ominous silence. "Yes?"

"I want to marry her."

"Impossible."

Silence.

"Why, Madame?"

"Why? Because she is young. Too young. Because the war brought you to her. And the war never brings anything good. Because you don't know her, and she doesn't know you. Because she is a Catholic, and you are not. Because I am her guardian and only relative, and I say no."

Sherwood said: "But listen, Madame, be reasonable. I will look after her——"

She screamed at him. "Do you think, I, a d'Arblay, cannot look after her?"

"You misunderstand, Madame. I love her. And I think she cares for me."

"*Pouf!* She cares for no one but my son. Yes, my son is dead, but"—she pointed a thin, quivering finger at him—"he is the reason why you cannot have Yvonne. Now go."

He went. You cannot argue with a woman whose mind is unhinged. He found Yvonne, made her put on a cloak and go with him. For three hours they walked and talked. She would not admit she loved him. To all his pleading she replied:

"I cannot leave her now. She has no one but me. I sinned in not loving Jean; no, do not interrupt; she wants me, I must stay with her."

It was final. She would promise nothing. He begged her to consider the future. What would happen if she tied herself to a selfish old woman?

"I do not know," she said. "I have made a vow I cannot break it."

Sherwood abandoned pleading, stormed, strangely eloquent. In vain. In the end, he strode angrily away.

Ten years ago. . . . She knew he had gone away, that was all. And now this letter. She could not leave the Château, but she would see him. Perhaps he was no longer interested in her. She was changed, now. And much can happen in ten years. He would be changed. Perhaps there was some other woman? So she tortured herself

Armistice Day. A day like any other day to all creatures except a few of the human race, handing down a sacred torch to kindle in men's hearts a memory and a message. May the message never be forgotten nor misread!

Sherwood, Tommy Brett, Curtis, and Reeves met that morning on the platform at Victoria. Sherwood carried a large suitcase.

"Two more to come," said Tommy. "Anderson and Gates. Sherwood dug them out. Stepping like a lord into one of these motor-buses in the country, offered a penny to the conductor, and blowed if it wasn't old Anderson! Then he's made to raise his optics driver-wards, and lo and behold, our old friend Johnny Hare!"

"That was over two months ago. They've made great strides since," said Sherwood. "Got several buses on the road, and an office."

"There they are," interrupted Tommy. "Inseparable as always. Come on, slackers, late for parade as usual. Double up there! What's happened to your moustache, Johnny?"

The two newcomers shook hands all round, exchanging bantering greetings. Someone—it was Tommy Brett, of course—made the time-honoured remark about the Governor of North Carolina and the Governor of South Carolina, and they all adjourned to the bar to celebrate the gathering of the clans.

Then the silence. A stiffening to attention and the precious two minutes. Sherwood, standing motionless, found himself thinking, critically, unsentimentally. A queer, fine gesture for an unimaginative people, this silence business. Nothing perfunctory about it either. Not like people shifting uneasily when the National Anthem was played. Undisciplined, disrespectful swine! He thought of Gordon, who had shot himself. Poor devil. . . Whistles, hooters, sirens in the distance sounded. The silence was over.

In the train began the endless discussion of the old days, everyone talking at once, slipping easily into the jargon of the Army. Only Sherwood was comparatively silent. It was not until they got to Calais that the old ragging habits of the mess reasserted themselves. Their train did not leave for an hour, and Tommy led the way out of the station with the air of a circus proprietor.

"I vote we send a telegram to the old Comtesse," he suggested. "Let's go on to Paris and enjoy ourselves."

His facetious proposal was greeted with mild laughter, but Sherwood cut in with a vicious :

"Don't be a damned fool, Brett."

Tommy stared at him in surprise.

"Why so hipped, my boy?" A grin spread over his ruddy face. "Of course. I was forgetting. What was her name? Listen, you chaps. Remember that dark-haired wench at the Château? Now you know why Sherwood suggested this little joy-ride."

"Shut up, Tommy," said Sherwood good-temperedly. "I shouldn't dream of taking you with me if this were a romantic expedition."

"Good for you, Sherwood," said Reeves, slapping his thigh and laughing hilariously.

"Oh yes, you would," retorted Tommy shrewdly. 'You need a chaperon, several of us in fact.'

They all laughed, and someone changed the subject. But there was not one of them who did not know what Sherwood was thinking.

Presently Sherwood said: "We must take some food and some bottles of wine with us. We can't very well put the old lady to the expense of feeding us all. I don't suppose she has a sou to spare these days."

"Can't do that," said Curtis "It would be an insult."

Sherwood glanced swiftly at his pale, lined face.

"I thought of that," he said. "The Comtesse is as proud as they make 'em. So I wrote and said we'd gladly dine with her—on one condition, that we should be allowed to bring our own grub. I made a joke of it, of course."

"Good for you," said Reeves. "Let's do some shopping."

"It's all fixed," said Sherwood. "The stuff's in this suitcase of mine. It's my show."

Tommy diplomatically interrupted Curtis, who was about to protest.

"That's what I call good staff work," he said. He looked at his watch. "By Jove, we haven't much time after all."

Tommy was right. They bundled into the train just in time. It stopped at Béthune, but they had no chance of looking round the little town familiar to most British officers who saw action on the Western front. Tommy Brett professed to be heartbroken, having repeatedly expressed his determination to investigate the whereabouts of the pretty little girl who used to be in the pastry shop in the main street. He was, of course, howled down by the others. They remembered Tommy and his little ways.

They reached Arras late in the afternoon. Silence fell upon them as they approached the cathedral. It was growing dark, and they could see only a few traces of the havoc wrought by high-explosive.

"Slightly different," said someone. It was the only comment.

Outside the old Château they hesitated, looking to Sherwood.

"You lead on," said Tommy. "It's your show."

Sherwood stepped forward and pulled at the rusty bell. They heard it jangle emptily in the distance. A door slammed, and the sound of shuffling feet approached. An old man carrying a lamp opened the door.

"Why, it's old Manchet," said Tommy. "What are you doing here? Have you given up the *estaminet*?"

The old man shook his head.

"Madame la Comtesse has hired my services for the occasion." He bowed with dignity. "You are welcome, Messieurs."

They followed him into the entrance hall, where they looked around with interest at the faded hangings.

"Same old place," said Tommy, forcing a grin. "Makes you think of the good old days, what?"

Reeves muttered something inaudible, but no one else spoke.

They trooped silently up the creaking stairs and were ushered into the presence of the Comtesse. She rose to greet them.

"You are very welcome," she said.

Solemnly she shook hands with each of them and bade them be seated. The Comtesse alone seemed completely at her ease. She began to ask questions, which Sherwood answered with grave politeness, occasionally glancing at the door.

Tommy made a gallant effort, explaining in laborious and execrable accents that, with the exception of Sherwood, they had sadly neglected their French since the war. Their hostess smiled understandingly.

"It does not matter," she said. Without irony she added, "Many things have been forgotten since the war."

It was a relief when old Manchet entered with a tray and glasses.

"We haven't forgotten how to drink an *apéritif*," said Tommy, raising his glass.

The tension broken, conversation became easier. Presently Tommy asked leave to go and look round the old place. With the exception of Sherwood the others

followed him. When they had gone the Comtesse turned to him.

"The others have come because it is Armistice Day, *hein?*" she said. "That is, of course, why no one speaks of it. You English are strange people. But you, *mon capitaine*, you have come because of . . . ?"

"Yvonne," said Sherwood.

"She is here," said the Comtesse composedly. "She has wanted to see you."

The old lady noted his hesitation.

"If she is still willing to marry you, and you want to take her . . ."

"Well?"

"My son would not wish," she said slowly, "to deprive her of happiness. She may be happy with you. I consent."

Sherwood bent and kissed her hand as the door opened.

It was Yvonne. The Comtesse, her delicate hands folded across her lap, watched their formal greeting with expressionless eyes. Then she rose, smoothing the black dress, and, bowing stiffly to Sherwood, moved to the door. Sherwood held it open for her.

The old lady slowly climbed the stairs. She stopped before a door and paused for a moment, her head lowered, her lips moving, as if in prayer. She opened the door and went in.

It was a room to which no one else had the privilege of entry. Everything had been left as Jean had left it. The books, the pipes, the pictures, the sabres on the wall; nothing had been taken away. One thing she had put in the room which had not been there before. It was a picture of Jean. She stood before it, looking up at him.

"You are right, my son. It will be for the best."



They sat down to dinner quietly. The Château d'Arblay had, as Tommy put it afterwards, got on their nerves. It was altogether different from the welcome billet of the war-time days. Then the air had resounded with the bustle of men, the clink of spurs and the rattle of harness, lorry engines throbbing outside, the thousand and one cheerful noises of a busy army. Voices had been raised in greeting, laughter rang through the place. And after a spell in "the line" the Château d'Arblay had seemed a haven of refuge and a paradise of comfort. Men gratefully described it as "a jolly good spot." And so it had been.

But now everything was different. The Château had survived the war's high-explosive only to crumble slowly into decay. Traces of machine-gun bullets scarred the walls which flanked the house; the masonry still showed gaps torn out by stray shells. But these were only scratches on its gaunt surface. Inside, the walls were damp. A musty smell betraying the lack of household fires pervaded the rooms. The carpets were faded, the furniture decrepit with age and neglect. Over it all brooded an atmosphere of desolation and decay.

Even the Comtesse was different. They remembered her, frail but incredibly active, sensible, alert, animated with an intense conviction that it was a sacred duty to fight and win the war.

They arranged themselves at the old mahogany table. Yvonne sat on one side of the Comtesse, Sherwood facing her. Next to Yvonne sat Curtis, Johnny Hare and Reeves. Opposite them were Tommy and the inseparable Gates and Anderson. At the foot of the table was an empty chair. No one asked why.

They watched the Comtesse now as she took her place. Her white hair gleaming in the light of the flickering candles, a delicate but still vigorous figure, she bravely defied the years. A casual observer would have admired her neat precision, her dignified carriage. But the men at the table who remembered her as she had been, knew that she had changed. She was different, queer somehow.

For a time she would play to perfection the part of hostess, austere, gravely solicitous of the comfort of her guests. Then she would stare unseeingly past them, heedless of the question someone had just put to her, straining her eyes in an effort to glimpse the invisible. Yvonne sat by her side, shy and tongue-tied. Sherwood, his eyes eloquent, was also silent.

It was left to Tommy to grapple nobly with the situation. Johnny Hare, Anderson and Gates, "the motor-bus magnates" Tommy had labelled them, played up gallantly and contrived to keep up a buzz of conversation at their end of the table. But when the Comtesse's words died on her lips and her eyes stared at the empty chair facing her beyond the candles, everyone was conscious of the strained atmosphere. Even Tommy's garrulous chatter was not proof against this ghostly silence and trailed off into nothingness. Yvonne, her hand appealingly on the Comtesse's sleeve, was ignored. The others concentrated uneasily on their plates, looking sidelong at each other.

In such a disquieting gap Curtis provided the one bright interlude of the evening. He rose suddenly to his feet, a light in his eyes, an odd smile on his lips, his glass raised to the light. Sherwood noticed that his hand trembled slightly.

"To the prosperity," he cried, "of the Southern Counties Motor Omnibus Company, Limited!"

It sounded absurd, and Reeves suddenly burst out laughing.

"What on earth——" began Tommy.

"I'll explain," said Anderson. "Gates and I—and Johnny Hare, of course—well, we've invited Curtis to join us. There's plenty of work—and dividends too, I hope—for all of us." He lifted his glass. "To you, Curtis, old man."

"Thank God," said Sherwood under his breath.

The Comtesse asked a few polite questions. Sherwood, glad of the opportunity to steer the conversation into normal channels, explained, while the rest eagerly discussed the prospects of the Southern Counties Motor Omnibus Company, Limited, as though it were the only subject that had ever interested them.

The dinner proceeded and conversation languished. Old Manchet's shadow flitted fitfully over the walls as he removed their plates and set new dishes in their place. The wine passed and the old crystal goblets were all refilled with the smooth amber liquid which gratefully escaped from the imprisonment of the dusty bottles.

Save the Comtesse there was not one who did not find it a relief to eat and drink, though afterwards they were hard put to it to remember what they had eaten. Their appetites had vanished under the influence of the queer white-haired woman who presided at the table.

It was while Sherwood was talking abstractedly to Tommy and Gates and Anderson beyond him that the Comtesse turned to Yvonne.

She spoke in quiet, unhurried tones.

" You have made up your mind ? "

Yvonne's eyes sought Sherwood's in vain, and she flushed as she replied.

" Maman, but I cannot. You know I cannot."

" But you will. I command it." Her voice softened  
" Presently, as soon as it can be arranged. Then you will come and see me sometimes, *hein* ? "

Yvonne nodded, her eyes glistening.

The Comtesse touched Sherwood's arm.

" You will drink the health of the King as you used to ? "

Sherwood filled his glass and rose to his feet.

The Comtesse looked round the table. With pride she noted the d'Arblay goblets. There were fortunately just enough to go round. Sherwood's voice rang out.

" Gentlemen, the King ! "

" The King."

They sat down in silence. Then Tommy jumped up

" I give you a toast," he said. He glanced swiftly at the empty chair. " To absent friends."

There was a moment's silence. The Comtesse was the first to stand. The others uncertainly followed suit. No one looked at the empty chair. Unwillingly almost they turned towards the Comtesse, their glasses in their hands.

Solemnly Sherwood repeated.

" To absent friends."

They raised the glasses to their lips.

Rigid, the Comtesse spoke.

" To the dead," she said evenly.

They drank. Then Sherwood turned abruptly on his heel. Afterwards he was at a loss to explain the

impulse which suddenly gave birth to the queerly dramatic gesture that followed. The spirit of some Celtic ancestor incarnate in him at that tense moment may—who knows?—have surged up at the bidding of an old and hallowed custom. Or maybe the decrepit Château and its pathetic hostess had so strained his nerves that something had to be done to snap the tension.

They all turned to him in odd expectancy. The Comtesse watched him, fearfully. The shadow of his upraised arm loomed grotesquely on the walls. It flashed downwards, and his glass splintered into pieces on the floor. Yvonne stifled a cry. In swift obedience to the impulse the others followed his example. Six empty glasses crashed together into a thousand crystal fragments.

Yvonne was trembling violently. The Comtesse let her glass drop from her hand. It broke with a faint metallic ring. She turned to Yvonne, who was nervously twisting the glass stem in her slender fingers. The girl lowered her eyes and, obedient to her gesture, threw down the last d'Arblay glass among the others. Then she covered her face in her hands as if to choke down her sobs, and turned and ran from the room.

The Comtesse calmly surveyed them.

In English she said: "I am very sorry. She is overwrought." She paused, and smiled faintly. "There are cigarettes over there. You will smoke, of course." Serenely she passed through the open door.

The party broke up abruptly soon after that. Sherwood explained that they had arranged to motor to Paris that night. But before they left he took the Comtesse on one side.

"You will forgive me, I hope," he said uncomfortably.

"And you will allow us to pay for the glasses we have smashed?"

The old Comtesse looked at him steadily. In the war she had fought obstinately for the last centime due to her for billets, fodder, reparations.

"You cannot pay," she said.

Sherwood nodded. He understood.

"It is settled, then," she said, looking at him steadily. "Yvonne is ready." For an instant her voice faltered. "She has—waited for you all these years. I know."

Sherwood stood very still. Memory suddenly illuminated for him something the Comtesse had once said.

"The war never brings anything good." The glow in his heart brought a faint smile to his lips. Dear Yvonne, incredibly dear Yvonne! The war had lain riches in his lap. Riches that had slipped from his grasp but had not tarnished with the years.

Presently Yvonne came. He held out his arms and she ran to him, like a fluttering bird that had found sanctuary. He held her very close.

Yvonne listened in the darkness. She knew that she would not sleep that night. Shivering, she slipped from her bed and gently pushed open the door.

Somewhere below, there was a noise. Someone was moving, scraping against something. Wrapping her thin dressing-gown tightly round her she softly descended the stairs. With alarm she saw a slant of light piercing the partition of the folding doors. Then it disappeared suddenly.

Her hand stifling the beating of her heart, she pushed open the door. The tiny flame of a single

candle on the old boards revealed the huddled figure of the Comtesse.

She stepped quietly forward, and for a moment watched the Comtesse gathering into her hands fragments of the precious glass. The war still struck at the Château d'Arblay, robbing, destroying. . . Then she dropped to her knees by her side and put her arms round the frail shoulders

"You will be cold, Maman," she said gently.

The old woman shook her head, and sighed the breath of her lonely, indomitable spirit.

"*C'est la guerre*," she said.

#### *Notes on "C'est la Guerre"*

This story was originally intended to be a character study of a French aristocrat reduced to poverty in the post-war years. Not a promising magazine subject! Its embryo form contained the meeting of the war-time brother officers and the visit to their old billet. The smashing of the glasses was the "point" of the story in its original conception.

Both the Armistice Day setting and the girl Yvonne were woven into the story at a later stage; Armistice Day because it gave more point to the visit, and Yvonne, because her "happy" ending relieved the story's bleakness. Without Yvonne the story would have been (I thought) so depressing that it would not have sold. Incidentally, the Armistice setting also improved its prospects, for it was submitted in the spring, when most magazine editors are wondering what they are going to put in their November issues.

The most difficult problem of this story was the smashing of the glasses. In order to justify this it was necessary to introduce the Comtesse's dead son (this fitted in well with Yvonne) and to prepare the reader for the unusual incident by creating the right atmosphere. Re-reading the story, I think I have failed

to get the effect I wanted. Sherwood's impulse is not convincingly accounted for. But there it is.

For the rest, the idea of war-time friends and their re-union appealed to me. I wanted to write this story. So many of the men who served gallantly in the war are now, many years after, "up against it" that I was tempted to stress the misfortune of Curtis. But magazine editors don't want sermons, however much justified they may be. So I dealt lightly—and in the end satisfactorily—with Curtis.

The number of characters in this story made it difficult to write. To take six ex-officers, whisk them off to dinner in France, and expect the reader to identify them by their names, is asking too much. So, in creating them, I made them distinct types as far as possible; Sherwood the silent; Tommy Brett cheerful and loquacious; and Curtis, sorely in need of help but too proud to accept charity; and Reeves with a wife and three children in the background. The remaining two with their motor-bus company are deliberately introduced later.

The women characters were much easier to handle. I may not have got the effect I wanted, but neither the Comtesse nor Yvonne gave me any trouble. What did give me trouble was the writing, or, rather, the presentation of the story.

It started off smoothly enough with the meeting of Sherwood and Tommy Brett. Their opening conversation was also easily done; I have had scores of similar conversations myself. (In fact, the Zillebeke dug-out is a fragment of my own experience.) But when they separated and I had to switch to the Château and the Comtesse, my difficulties began.

On consideration it seemed advisable to weave into this second section the past story of Yvonne, the dead Jean, and Sherwood. The reader has to be told all this, and it is conveyed by starting Yvonne off on a train of thought inspired naturally enough by Sherwood's letter. This indirectly helped to reveal more of the Comtesse's character.

The third section begins the story proper. Not until this was well into its stride did I find the story easy to write. The actual opening—on Armistice Day—was a problem. I had to look up the trains and fit in the time of the Silence. The change at Calais—a small point—had to be verified by reference to time-



tables. As soon as I had got the party in Arras, the story went ahead. The reference to the pastry shop, by the way, will be appreciated by all who knew Béthune during the war!

The Comtesse's change of heart is plausible enough, I think; but although I tried hard to create "atmosphere" at the dinner it would not, and does not, satisfy. There is an earlier reference to the precious goblets—a "Key" sentence on page 914.\* Another technical point perhaps worth noting is the use of Gates's and Anderson's motor-bus company to provide a happy solution of Curtis's difficulties. This links up with the earlier references to their motor-bus company. This earlier mention is essential; it would never do to introduce it suddenly at the dinner-table.

The ending was troublesome. It strikes an unhappy note; somehow I couldn't make it otherwise. The editor of the *Royal* did, in fact, ask me to alter it. I wrote a longer and less sorrowful ending, but I did not like it, and as the editor also didn't like it, it was scrapped and the original ending allowed to stand. The title was originally "The Toast," but the *Royal* preferred my alternative title "C'est la Guerre."

This story was offered—unsuccessfully—in the United States. The Fiction Editor (I think he deserves the capitals) of one of the biggest American magazines thought it, "A smooth and artistic bit of work"; but was afraid "it would not make enough readers froth at the mouth with excitement, or leap to their feet and run around in circles."

On the whole, I'm rather glad. I should hate a story of mine to have that effect on anyone.

\* Cf. *Short Story Writing for Profit*, p. 86.

## "THE PIGEON" \*

"FIFTY pounds!" groaned Timothy Binks. "Fifty pounds! And we figured it out it couldn't possibly be less than a thousand! To think of the old fool gambling away our money like that!"

"It wasn't really ours," said Millie, mildly reproachful. "After all, the money was his to do what he liked with. It's rather unkind of us to talk like this now that he's dead. And fifty pounds is better than nothing."

"What's the use of fifty pounds?" demanded Timothy explosively. "Can we get married on fifty pounds? Can we buy a grocery business for fifty pounds? No, of course not! It's a wicked shame, that's what it is. Uncle George knew well enough we've been counting for all these years on coming into his bit of money. Why, he promised me—and more than once, too—that we should be comfortable for the rest of our lives. And then he must go and start betting at his time of life! It makes me tired."

He kicked at his chair and pulled from his pocket the lawyer's copy of his uncle's will.

"Listen to this!" Timothy was saying, regardless of the fact that Millie already knew it almost by heart:

" ' I am convinced that the system, if properly carried out, is certain to show a handsome profit. It is a complete fallacy that bookmakers must always win. I bequeath all my racing records and papers to my nephew, Timothy Binks, and it is my wish that he should seriously devote himself to the study and development of the system and thus make the fortune which time alone has prevented me from making.' "

Timothy threw the typewritten document down in disgust.

" Mad as a hatter ! " he cried. " I'll show you what I think of his precious system ! "

Rising from his chair he walked across the room and picked up a large bundle of papers and notebooks which he had carried home with him from his uncle's house. Disregarding Millie's protests he snapped the string that held them together and began to tear the closely-written pages into thousands of pieces. Within a few minutes a mass of torn paper littered the room. Millie watched him, horrified. This was a new Timothy, very different from the cautious, unenterprising young fellow whom her mother always described with enthusiasm as so steady and reliable. When he had quite finished he seized his hat and jammed it on his head.

" Where are you going ? " asked Millie timidly.

" To see that old fool of a lawyer and get him to advance me the fifty pounds ! " At the door he turned back and picked up a newspaper from the table. " And then I'm going to the races. I'm going to have a day out, and do in the fifty where the rest has gone ! " he added bitterly.

" Timothy ! " breathed Millie, in a horror-stricken

whisper. "You—you can't mean it! Surely you're not going to waste all that money on betting?"

"All that money!" echoed Timothy bitterly. "Yes, I am. Give me that paper. Trains—yes, I've just got time. So long, Millie," and with a parting flourish of the newspaper he was gone.

About two hours later Timothy threw away the butt-end of a cigar he hadn't enjoyed, adjusted his buttonhole and strolled down a platform of Waterloo Station. The train was crowded, but he managed to find a comparatively empty carriage with the aid of the boy from whom he purchased all the latest racing editions. He settled himself comfortably in a corner seat, and the train moved off.

Opposite him sat a heavily-built man who fingered his massive gold watch-chain, and alternately looked out of the railway carriage window and at Timothy. He seemed satisfied with his inspection and, whistling softly, bestowed an expressive wink on the lantern-jawed individual who sat next to him.

Still whistling, he produced from the depths of a large hip-pocket a piece of green baize and three playing-cards. From the opposite corner a clerical-looking gentleman regarded him with every sign of disapproval.

Timothy watched him a little apprehensively from behind the racing edition of the *News*

Timothy was trying to remember what this little trick with three cards was called. He had a vague idea it was a swindle, and forthwith tried to concentrate, without success, on the tabulated lists of horses, jockeys, weights, and distances, which were so much Greek to him.

"Find the lady!" said the heavy-jowled one, in a loud, amiable voice, addressing no one in particular. "Find the lady! The easiest way to make a fortune—better than backin' 'orses!"

Dexterously he manipulated the cards on the small square of green baize. In spite of himself Timothy watched him, studying with some apprehension first the twinkling cards and then the criminal visage of the speaker. Suddenly the man's eyes met his.

"Have a try, guv'nor!" he said. "Two pound to a pound you don't name the lady. Look how easy it is! One, two, three, there she is still—one, two, now take your pick!"

Timothy shook his head.

"Go on," urged the other. "'Ere, 'ave a go for nothing! Come on—it won't cost you anything!"

"I shouldn't!" said a deep voice from the other corner. It was the gentleman who looked like a clergyman. "It is impossible to win at a game like that!"

"Impossible?" echoed the heavy-jowled one in a tone of pained surprise. "Why, if you've got a good pair of eyes you can win every time. Besides, who's going to win or lose? This gent and I are 'aving a friendly game to pass the time away."

He smiled joviably at Timothy, and pushed the cards closer towards him.

"Now come on, sir," he begged. "Cost you nothing! Just watch me closely. There she is! One, two, there she is again! One, two, three—now pick her out, sir!"

Thus appealed to, Timothy thrust a timid finger in the direction of the middle card. The man turned it over—it was the queen!

"What did I tell you? Have a little flutter, guv'nor!" he urged. "'Ere you are, there's money for the asking, almost!" And he produced a bundle of notes and threw them carelessly on to the green baize. "If you win you get two pounds. Now just put a pound up and have a go!"

Timothy hesitated—then decided to try his luck.

In less than five minutes he had won ten pounds. The clerical gentleman moved along the seat and leaned over Timothy's shoulder, his eyes gleaming enviously.

"May I join in?" he asked nervously. "Your luck's in, sir. Let's go halves." And he began to fumble in his pockets.

Suddenly the train pulled up with a jerk. A second or two later a square-shouldered man thrust his head through the window.

"Ah, there you are!" he said pleasantly. "Come on, out of it, and no fuss!"

Timothy gazed around him in bewilderment. The heavy-jowled man, his cadaverous companion and, to his utter astonishment, the clerical gentleman, obeyed meekly enough.

"Here, I want that money I lent you," said the three-card expert meaningly, as he passed Timothy.

"What's that?" demanded the square-shouldered one.

"Oh, nothing," was the reply, made in a tone of suppressed fury. "Only this—this mug has done me out of ten quid!"

"But I won it!" said Timothy blankly.

The square-shouldered man laughed outright.

"Well, I congratulate you," he said. "You're the

only man who's ever stung these beauties, I'll warrant. Come on. Nobby, get a move on."

The carriage door slammed, and Timothy surveyed the empty compartment incredulously. What did it all mean? Was he a policeman in plain clothes? Could he have meant that they were deliberately letting him win at first? Timothy gave it up. Well, the ten pounds was real enough, he thought, as he mechanically thrust the notes into his pocket.

He had scarcely recovered from his astonishment when the train pulled up at its destination. He got out of the carriage and followed the swarming crowd of people through the barrier and on to the road that led to the course.

There he timidly consulted a burly policeman, who looked at him curiously, and curtly advised him to go into Tattersall's.

"But I want to go to the races."

The policeman glared at him suspiciously for a moment, then, controlling himself with an effort, explained to the mystified Timothy that Tattersall's was the betting enclosure.

"That's what I want," beamed Timothy, thanking him.

The policeman stared at his retreating back, and soliloquised softly and slowly: "There's a pigeon ripe for the plucking! I wonder if his mother knows he's out?"

Timothy took his place in the jostling queue, paid his entrance money, bought a race-card, and stood, more than a little bewildered, in the centre of Tattersall's

The shouting of the bookmakers, the excited hum of voices, the hurrying to and fro of the vast crowd were all new to him. From where he stood he could see the stretch of green that marked the course. Numbers were being put up in a huge metal frame by the side of jockeys' names. He looked at the race-card in his hand and saw that the first race was due to begin in ten minutes' time.

"I must have a bet," he said to himself. Taking a deep breath, he approached a bookmaker who was shouting something unintelligible in a very loud and raucous voice.

"Excuse me," he began.

"Whassat!" ejaculated the bookmaker, looking down at Timothy from the raised level of the box on which he was standing. "Which one?"

"I want to back a horse," explained Timothy mildly. "Which one do you advise me to back?"

The bookmaker went nearly purple in the face. After a convulsive second he shouted something unintelligible in Timothy's face and turned his back.

Timothy turned to his race-card for enlightenment. He ran his eye down the list of horses' names. What was it the bookmaker had said? Ah, there it was, surely! Gabrielle!

He drew from his pocket Uncle George's legacy, and after a second's hesitation went up to the bookmaker again.

"I want to put fifty pounds on Gabrielle," he said.

At this the red-faced bookmaker became positively human

"Yessir," he replied promptly, snatching the notes



from Timothy's outstretched hand. "Eight to one to you, sir. And the number is forty-five."

Timothy received a small printed ticket and made his way with some difficulty to the rails which lined the course. The next minute he heard a man's voice shouting :

"I'll lay twenty to one Gabrielle !"

He turned round, puzzled. What could it mean ? A horrible thought struck him. He had been swindled ! The red-faced man had only given him odds of eight to one.

At once he tried to push his way through the crowd towards the red-faced bookmaker. Luckily for him, the horses appeared at that moment, and the eager crowd which besieged the rails effectually prevented him. He found himself wedged in, and philosophically decided to stay where he was and watch the race.

A minute or two elapsed before a sudden roar from the crowd signified that they were "off." Timothy hurriedly examined his card to identify Gabrielle's colours. Green and black halves, purple cap, he read. Something of the crowd's infectious enthusiasm seized him, and he eagerly craned his neck in the direction of the bunch of horses that were now racing round the bend.

The excitement of the race gripped him. Horses' names were being shouted wildly. Cries of : "The favourite wins !" "No, Wonky's won it !" "A hundred to ten on the favourite !" swelled to a veritable babel of voices as the horses flashed past. Where was Gabrielle ? Then, to his dismay, he spotted his horse. It followed the rest past the post at a respectful distance—absolutely last !

Timothy stumbled out of the crowd and made his

melancholy way to the far corner of the enclosure. How he wished he had won ! Still, that was only the first race. He began to study his race-card. How did one pick out the winners ? He frowned at the meaningless list of names. Suddenly came inspiration. He took a pin from the lapel of his coat and, shutting his eyes, jammed it into the list of horses.

The pin pierced well and truly through the name Troubadour. Good. He would back Troubadour ! The numbers were once more being put into the frame as he made his way towards the row of bookmakers. It was only when he had made up his mind to accept odds of three to one about Troubadour that he suddenly remembered he had no money !

With a groan he turned away. What a fool to put all his money on the first race ! He might just as well go home now. What was the good of his resolve to obtain the fair odds ? He watched the horses line up for the next race without enthusiasm.

Suddenly he put his hand to his pocket. The ten pounds ! Of course. He rushed up to the nearest bookmaker.

He was only just in time. The man had only just given him the ticket which would be worth thirty pounds to him if Troubadour won when the cry went up from a thousand throats :

“ They’re off ! ”

Breathlessly Timothy watched. The thudding of horses’ hoofs rattled an accompaniment to the shouting of the crowd. Then someone shouted :

“ Troubadour wins this time ! Good old Troubadour ! ”

Timothy nearly fainted with excitement as the orange

jacket of Troubadour's jockey raced past the winning-post, an easy winner.

Feverishly he jammed the faithful pin once more into the list of runners for the next race. Alas! The pin stuck neatly between two horses. What was he to do? He thoughtfully pulled it out again, the demon of superstition tormenting him. Should he leave the race alone?

Whether one of Timothy's ancestors had in the dim and distant past distinguished himself by his appetite for the gaming-tables it is impossible to say, but it may conceivably provide an explanation. Timothy reverted to type. Of course, he would bet on the race! He ran his eye down the page and stopped at a horse called Brimstone. Had he been an American he would undoubtedly have said to himself, "I've got a hunch it will win."

And win it did, at ten to one.

His pockets were beginning to get uncomfortably full, though, perhaps, uncomfortably is hardly the word to use. There were still two races to be run. Timothy had had nothing to eat since breakfast, but felt no hunger. He was enjoying himself.

In the next race he backed the favourite because he overheard a man saying bitterly that it was about time an adjectival favourite won. Timothy only had one hundred pounds on it, so that the race enriched him by the modest trifle of two hundred pounds.

He did not stop to think what it all meant to him. Racing had got into his blood. The sensation of handling incredible sums of money numbed all his normal faculties. Only once did he pause to think of Millie—and then

because his eye was arrested by the name " Sweet Millicent " in the last race.

That decided him. Sweet Millicent should carry his money. He made a rapid calculation, and decided to invest the whole of his winnings—five hundred pounds—at three to one.

About ten yards behind him in the crowd a man nudged his companion excitedly, and both turned to point out Timothy to the heavilybuilt man who stood beside them. Could Timothy have seen who they were he would have nearly jumped out of his shoes.

As it was, his eyes were glued to a spot five furlongs down the course, where the horses were lining up for the start. Sweet Millicent was now a raging favourite. The blue-and-white stripes of her jockey's colours were easily distinguishable.

At last they were off '

It takes roughly a minute for a racehorse to cover five furlongs. Therefore I do not exaggerate when I say that Timothy held his breath for the whole of the race. As they turned the slight bend into the straight, he could see that two horses were racing neck to neck—and one of them was Sweet Millicent.

As they thundered up the straight the shouting, first for one horse then for the other, swelled into a mighty roar. They raced past together as if actuated by the same mechanism. Which would win ?

Then Timothy did a shameful thing, disgracing his shadowy ancestor of the gaming-table. He shut his eyes.

The shouting ceased as if by magic, and for a second the silence was uncanny      Then the number of the winner

went into the frame. Timothy opened his eyes and looked. It was Sweet Millicent !

By the time he had collected all the money Tattersall's was nearly empty. One fact danced in his brain in dazzling figures. He had won altogether two thousand pounds ! He moved unsteadily towards the exit. He had gone in a disappointed man, and emerged rich.

The crowd streaming along the road in the same direction reminded him that the train would be uncomfortably full, and it suddenly dawned on him that he was now independent of trains. He would have a taxi.

Before he had time to turn round and look for one, a hand touched him on the shoulder, and he suddenly found himself between two men with a third treading almost on his heels behind. A voice said softly :

" We've come to get our money back."

It was the trio of the railway carriage !

Timothy stopped dead, but the big man with the heavy jaw took one of his arms and his companion the other, and the clerical gentleman prodded him abruptly into motion again. In this extraordinary fashion they proceeded along the road, to all intents and purposes a friendly party returning from the races.

" To get that money back," repeated the voice from behind. " With interest," it added meaningly.

The encounter was so unexpected that it took Timothy a minute or two to recover his wits.

" This is an outrage," he choked.

" It's a bit late to think of that now," said the man who had been called Nobby.

And with a sudden jerk they pulled up by the side of

a motionless taxicab, flung the door open and bundled Timothy inside. Timothy made a last desperate effort to escape, but a large hand forcibly closed over his mouth and his arms and legs were neatly pinioned.

The door closed and the cab moved off. Timothy found himself sitting between the clerical-looking man and the cadaverous one. The big man called Nobby sat opposite, a gleam of evil satisfaction in his eye.

As soon as he could frame the words, Timothy stammered :

"I'll give you back the ten pounds I didn't mean——"

Nobby laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said. Then suddenly :  
"Turn his pockets out !"

In less than a minute Timothy's pockets were absolutely empty. With staring eyes he watched them calmly transfer the whole of his two thousand pounds into a small black bag. The sight was too much for him. He wrenched himself free with a tremendous effort and leapt straight at the big man opposite.

The other two rose simultaneously, and flung themselves at the struggling Timothy. A desperate scuffle ensued, the four of them tumbling over each other in the swaying cab. Something dropped with a thud, but no one noticed it. Timothy fought a losing battle gallantly, crushing his fist into the big man's face, and swinging his elbow luckily into the clerical one's eye ; but it was soon over. With an oath, the big man seized him, lifted him right into the air and flung him on to the floor of the cab.

It was quite clear to the unfortunate Timothy that

discretion was the better part of valour. As he painfully struggled to his feet he encountered something hard and smooth underneath him, and his hand promptly closed over it. Under cover of rising, he managed to slip it into his pocket. As he did so he realised with a wild beating of his heart that it was a revolver.

The taxi was now speeding along a country lane. Nobby, still breathing heavily, glared menacingly at Timothy and put his head out of the window. He seemed satisfied, and said something to the driver. The cab pulled up with a jerk.

"Throw him out!" said Nobby impatiently; and between them they hauled Timothy out of the taxi and deposited him without ceremony in the middle of the road.

"Good-bye, cocksparrow!" said the clerical-looking man, waving his hand in mock farewell. And the three of them turned towards the cab.

"Hands up!" rang out Timothy's voice promptly.

They wheeled round suddenly and found themselves faced, not by a pathetic scarecrow sitting in the middle of the dusty road, but by a determined young man pointing a revolver at their heads.

For an infinitesimal second they hesitated, then slowly raised their hands above.

"Keep them where they are!" warned Timothy; and, without moving his eyes, ordered the taxi-driver—who had jumped off his seat in sheer amazement—to empty their pockets. Fortunately, the man took in the situation at a glance, and obeyed without hesitation.

"Now tie 'em up one at a time," said Timothy cheerfully.

The driver, grinning, produced a tidy length of rope and trussed them up neatly and scientifically.

Timothy stretched his limbs and laughed.

"Into the cab with them," he said, "and to the nearest police-station. Then we'll go home. But I'll pay your fare first," he added.

And diving into the cab he produced the black bag and handed the astonished driver ten pounds.

Two hours later Timothy stopped the cab at the end of a road, bade a cheery farewell to the driver, and, carrying a shabby black bag, set off at a brisk pace in the direction of Millie's house. He presented a strange sight. His clothing was torn and dusty, one eye was sadly discoloured, he had no hat, but as he strode along he whistled an exceedingly cheerful tune.

Millie nearly shrieked when she saw him.

"Whatever have you done?" she cried, dragging him inside. "Oh, Timothy, I knew something dreadful would happen! Don't keep me in suspense, dear!"

Timothy didn't. Briefly he described everything that had happened, omitting only to tell her what he had won.

"But the three men," she said. "How did they manage to follow you?"

"They told me that at the police-station," explained Timothy. "You see, the fellow who hauled them off the train was only a railway detective, and he couldn't do more than clear them off the line, and unluckily—for them—they were also bound for the races."

"Oh, Timothy," breathed Millie, "thank goodness you're safe! No more race meetings for you, dear!"



"What!" said Timothy. "But I've got a surprise for you. Poor Uncle George wasn't such a fool as I thought. I've won about two thousand pounds!"

And he calmly emptied the contents of the black bag on to the table.

"Two thousand pounds!" gasped Millie. "Oh, Timothy, darling, that means we can get married at once, and buy the grocery business, and——"

"Grocery business?" said Timothy. "I'm not going to buy any grocery business; I'm going to the races again to-morrow!"

"Going to the races?" echoed Millie. "Indeed you're not! You're going round about that business to-night!" And with a sweep of her arm she transferred the pile of notes on the table into her outstretched apron. "And now I'm going to bathe your poor eye."

Timothy looked at her blankly. Then the ghost of a smile fluttered across his face.

"Sweet Millicent wins!" he said, and took her in his arms and kissed her.

### *Notes on "The Pigeon"*

This story is one of the earliest I wrote. Its origin I don't remember. (Possibly it was inspired by an unsuccessful visit to Sandown Park!)

Although it is not, strictly speaking, a racing story, it could not have been written without some acquaintance with racing and the habits of racing "regulars." Provided one has such specialised knowledge, it is a profitable policy to try one's hand at fiction with a sporting setting. Racing stories in particular are in demand, and a readable yarn of this type is almost certain to find a market. But the technical side must be avoided or only lightly touched upon. A sporting story must be intelligible to

readers who have absolutely no acquaintance with the subject. In this connection, P. G. Wodehouse's golfing stories (and golf is chockful of technical terms mysterious to the uninitiated) will amply repay study. They are models of their kind.

But although a race meeting is only the setting of "The Pigeon," it is perhaps worth noting that in short story writing as in other things a little learning is proverbially dangerous. To base a story on merely a superficial acquaintance with its local colour is to invite trouble. Established novelists sometimes run this risk; one popular author (who ought to have known better) described a runner in the Derby as "a four-year-old gelding." Racing with its traditions and almost mathematical complications must be understood to be used for fictional purposes.

As for this little story, there is scarcely any point worth discussion. It was written in an evening, and published under a pen-name. I remember it amused me to write it. It is the kind of story anyone can write—and sell.

## THE YELLOW CAT \*

IT all began when Grey was followed home, inexplicably enough, by the strange, famished yellow cat. The cat was thin, with large intense eyes which gleamed amber in the forlorn light of the lamp on the street corner. It was standing there as Grey passed, whistling dejectedly, for he had had a depressing run of luck at Grannie's tables, and it made a slight piteous noise as it looked up at him. Then it followed at his heels, creeping along as though it expected to be kicked unceremoniously out of the way.

Grey did indeed make a sort of half-threatening gesture when, looking over his shoulder, he saw the yellow cat behind.

"If you were a black cat," he muttered, "I'd welcome you—but get out!"

The cat's melancholy amber eyes gleamed up at him, but it made no sign and continued to follow. This would have annoyed Grey in his already impatient humour, but he seemed to find a kind of savage satisfaction in the fact that he was denied even the trifling consolation of a good omen. Like all gamblers, he was intensely superstitious, although he had had experience in full measure of the futility of all supposedly luck-bringing mascots. He

carried a monkey's claw sewn in the lining of his waistcoat pocket, not having the courage to throw it away. But this wretched yellow cat that ought to have been black did not irritate him as might have been expected.

He laughed softly ; the restrained, unpleasant laugh of a man fighting against misfortune.

"Come on, then, you yellow devil, we'll sup together."

He took his gloveless hand from his coat-pocket and beckoned to the animal at his heels ; but it took as little notice of his gesture of invitation as it had of his menacing foot a moment before. It just slid along the greasy pavement, covering the ground noiselessly, not deviating in the slightest from the invisible path it followed without hesitation.

It was a bitterly cold, misty night, raw and damp. Grey shivered as he thrust his hand back into the shelter of his pocket and hunched his shoulders together underneath the thin coat that afforded but little protection against the cold.

For a moment he forgot the cat ; he thought of his present plight. The ill-luck that had so persistently dogged his efforts to make money in the only way he knew how was overwhelming.

With a shudder of relief he turned into the shelter of the courtyard which lay between the icy street and the flight of stairs which led to his room. As he stumbled numbly over the rough cobblestones of the yard he suddenly noticed that the yellow cat had disappeared.

He was not surprised, and gave no thought whatever to the incident until, a few minutes later, at the top of the ramshackle stairs, the feeble light of a hurricane lamp

revealed the creature sitting, or, rather, lying, across the threshold of his door.

He took an uncertain step backward. He said to himself, "That's odd." The cat looked up at him impassively with brooding, sullen eyes. He opened the door, stretching over the animal to turn its crazy handle.

Silently the yellow cat rose and entered the shadowy room. There was something uncanny, almost sinister in its smooth, noiseless movements. With fingers that shook slightly, Grey fumbled for matches, struck a light and, closing the door behind him, lit the solitary candle which stood beside his bed.

He lived in this one room, over a mews which had become almost fashionable since various poverty-stricken people, whose names still carried some weight with the bourgeois tradesmen of this Mayfair backwater, had triumphantly installed themselves; and Grey turned it skilfully to account when he spoke with casual indifference of "the flat" he occupied, "next to Lady Susan Tyrrell's, you know." Lady Susan's flat, an artistic horror in blasphemous colour, was more than well known; photographs of it had appeared many times in the illustrated society weeklies.

Grey's room had never been photographed, not as you might imagine for the simple reason that it was a miserable garret, but because Grey's profession did not warrant the illumination of publicity.

Grey, although he would never have admitted it, was a cardsharp and professional gambler. But even a cardsharp needs a little ordinary luck. Night after night he watched money pass into the hands of "the pigeons," ignorant, reckless youngsters, and foolish old

women who, having money to burn, ought by all the rules of the game to have lost. Yet when playing with him, Grey, a man respected even among the shabby fraternity of those who live by their wits, they won. He had turned to roulette, but, even with a surreptitious percentage interest in the bank, he had lost. His credit was exhausted. Grannie herself had told him he was a regular Jonah. He was cold, hungry, and desperate. Presently his clothes, the last possession, would betray him, and no longer would he be able to borrow the casual trifle that started him nightly in his desperate bout with fortune.

The room contained a wooden bed and a chair. A rickety table separated them. The chair served Grey as a wardrobe; on the table stood a candle with a few used matches which he used to light the cheap cigarettes he smoked in bed; the grease had a habit of adhering to the tobacco when the candle was used, and Grey was fastidious. The walls were bare save for a cupboard, a pinned-up *Sporting Life* Racing Calendar and two cheap reproductions of Kirchner's midinettes. There was no carpet on the floor. A piece of linoleum stretched from the empty grate to the side of the bed.

At first Grey could not see the cat, but the candle, gathering strength, outlined its shadow grotesquely against the wall. It was crouched on the end of the bed.

He lighted one of the used matches and lit the small gas-ring which was the room's sole luxury. Gas was included in the few shillings he paid weekly for rent; consequently Grey used it for warmth. He seldom used it to cook anything, as neither whisky (which he got by arrangement with one of Grannie's waiters), bread nor cheese, which formed his usual diet, require much cooking.

The cat moved and, jumping noiselessly on to the floor, cautiously approached the gas-ring, by the side of which it stretched its lean yellowish body. Very softly but plaintively it began to mew.

Grey cursed it. Then he turned to the cupboard and took out a cracked jug. He moved the bread on to his own plate and poured out the little milk it contained in the shallow bread-plate.

The cat drank, not greedily, but with the fierce rapidity which betokens hunger and thirst. Grey watched it idly as he poured whisky into a cup. He drank, and refilled the cup. He then began to undress carefully, in order to prolong the life of his worn dinner-jacket.

The cat looked up. Grey, taking off his shirt, beneath which, having no vest, he wore another woollen shirt, became uncomfortably aware of its staring yellow eyes. Seized with a crazy impulse, he poured the whisky from his cup into the remainder of the milk in the plate.

"Share and share alike!" he cried. "Drink, you——"

Then the yellow cat snarled at him; the vilest, loathsome sound; and Grey for a moment was afraid. Then he laughed, as if at himself for allowing control to slip, and finished undressing, folding the garments carefully and hanging them on the chair.

The cat went back to its place at the foot of the bed, its eyes gleaming warily in Grey's direction. He restrained his impulse to throw it out of the room, and clambered between the rough blankets without molesting it. He smoked in silence, conscious of the animal's unblinking gaze, which seemed full of a hidden meaning, as though the

secret of his destiny lay behind those luminous eyes. He fell asleep.

By daylight the cat was an ugly, misshapen creature. It had not moved from the bed. Grey regarded it with amused contempt.

Usually the morning found him profoundly depressed and irritable. For some unaccountable reason he felt now almost light-hearted. He looked round the wretched room which had never failed to stir his accumulated grievances against existence; but now he laughed, without resentment.

He dressed, counted his money, and decided to permit himself the luxury of some meagre shopping in the adjacent Warwick Market, which supplied the most expensive restaurant proprietors with the cheapest food. Nevertheless, it was an accommodating spot for knowledgeable individuals like Grey.

The cat, still crouching on the bed, made no attempt to follow him, and he closed the door as softly as its erratic hinges would allow, aware that the cat's eyes still gazed steadily in his direction.

In the market he obeyed an impulse to buy food for the cat, and at the cost of a few pence added a portion of raw fish to his purchases. On the way home he cursed himself for a fool, and would have thrown the fish away, the clumsy paper wrapping having become sodden with moisture, when he was hailed by a voice he had almost forgotten.

"Grey! Just the man I want to see!"

Grey greeted him with a fair show of amiability,



although, if appearance were any indication, the other was even less prosperous than himself. He, too, had been an habitu   of Grannie's in the old days, but had long since drifted out on the sea of misfortune. Despite his shabby appearance, he turned to Grey and said :

" You'll have a drink ? " Then, noting Grey's dubious glance, he laughed and added : " It's on me all right. I've just touched lucky."

A little later Grey emerged from the public-house on the corner the richer by five pounds, which the other had insisted on lending him in return for past favours. What exactly the past favours had been Grey was too dazed to inquire ; as far as he could recollect he had always treated the man with scant courtesy. He did not even remember his name.

He was still trying to remember who the man was when he climbed the stairs. He knew him well enough, for Grey was the type who never forgets a face. It was when his eyes alighted on the yellow cat that he suddenly remembered.

The man was Felix Mortimer. And Felix Mortimer had shot himself during the summer !

At first Grey tried to assure himself that he had made a mistake. Against his better judgment he tried to convince himself that the man merely bore a strong resemblance to Felix Mortimer. But at the back of his mind *he knew*.

Anyway, the five-pound note was real enough.

He placed the fish in a saucepan and lit the gas-ring.

Presently the cat was eating, in that curious, deliberate way it had drunk the milk the night before. Its emaciated appearance plainly revealed that it was starving ; yet it

devoured the fish methodically, as though now assured of a regular supply.

Grey, turning the five-pound note in his hand, wondered whether the cat had after all changed his luck. But his thoughts kept reverting to Felix Mortimer. . . .

The next few days left him in no doubt. At Grannie's that night fortune's pendulum swung back unmistakably. He won steadily. From roulette he turned to *chemin de fer*, elated to find that his luck held good.

"Your luck's changed—with a vengeance!" said one of the "regulars" of the shabby genteel saloon.

"With a vengeance," echoed Grey, and paused; wondering with the superstition of the born gambler if there were significance in the phrase.

He dismissed the fleeting thought in the present fascination of gambling—to win. The night sped on winged, joyous feet. He could do nothing wrong. He found himself the centre of attraction, the gambler whose wagers smaller and less fortunate punters followed, like poor men seeking crumbs from the rich man's table. Grey revelled in it, quietly and unostentatiously, his calculating eye on his winnings. Not for nothing had he graduated in one of the hardest schools of mankind.

He left Grannie's the richer by two hundred odd pounds.

His success was the prelude to the biggest slice of luck, to use his own phrase, that he had ever known. He gambled scientifically, not losing his head, methodically banking a proportion of his gains each morning; planning, scheming, striving to reach that high-water mark at which, so he told himself with the gambler's time-worn futility, he would stop and never gamble again.

Somehow he could not make up his mind to leave the poverty-stricken room in the fashionable mews. He was terribly afraid it would spell a change of luck. He tried to improve it, increase its comfort, but it was significant that he bought first a basket and a cushion for the yellow cat.

For there was no doubt in his mind that the cat was the cause of his sudden transition from poverty to prosperity. In his queer, intensely superstitious mind the yellow cat was firmly established as his mascot.

He fed it regularly, waiting on it himself as though he were its willing servant. He made a spasmodic attempt to caress it, but the cat snarled savagely at him and, frightened, he left it alone. If the cat ever moved from the room he never saw it go; whenever he went in or came out the cat was there, watching him with its gleaming amber eyes.

He accepted the situation philosophically enough. Sometimes when he had been drinking—a distraction he permitted himself when not at the tables—he would talk to the animal, and this it seemed to tolerate well enough. He would talk to the cat of himself, his plans for the future, the new people he met—for money had speedily unlocked more exalted doors than Grannie's—all this in the eloquence derived from wine and solitude he would pour out into the unmoved ears of the cat crouching at the foot of the bed. And then, without daring to speak of it, he would think of Felix Mortimer, and the gift that had proved the turning-point of his fortunes. There was something queer about that. Thinking of it he would stare broodingly at the yellow cat, loathing it inexplicably.

The creature watched him impassively, contemptuously indifferent to his raving or his silence. But the weird ménage continued, and Grey's luck held good.

The days passed, and he became ambitious. He was now within reach of that figure which he fondly imagined would enable him to forsake his precarious existence. He told himself that he was now, to all intents and purposes, safe. And he decided to move into more civilised and appropriate surroundings.

Nevertheless, he himself procured an expensive wicker contraption to convey the yellow cat from the garret to his newly acquired and, by contrast, luxurious maisonette. It was furnished in abominable taste, but the reaction from sheer poverty had its effect. And then he had begun to drink more than was good for a man who required a cool head and a steady nerve for at least part of a day which was really night.

One day he had cause to congratulate himself on his new home. For he met, for the first time in his thirty odd years of life, a woman. Now Grey divided women into two classes. There were "the regulars"—soulless creatures with the gambler's fever and the cook's alphabet—and "pigeons," foolish women, some young, most of them old, who flourished their silly but valuable plumage to be plucked by such as he.

But Elise Dyer was different. She stirred his pulses with a strange, exquisite sensation. Her incredibly fair hair, flaxen as waving corn, her fair skin, her deep violet eyes and her delicate carmine mouth provoked him into a state of unaccustomed bewilderment. Other people may have seen in her an ordinary sort of girl, pretty in a common sort of way; to Grey she was a revelation, a

creature on a higher plane, an incarnation of the beauty his life had missed. It took him a few days to make up his mind he wanted her.

They talked one night of mascots. Grey, who had never mentioned the yellow cat to a soul, whispered that he would, if she cared, show her the mascot that had brought him his now proverbial good luck. The girl agreed with eager enthusiasm to his diffident suggestion to go with him to his flat ; and he, in his strange simplicity, stammered that she would do him honour. He had forgotten that Elise Dyer knew him for a rich man.

Elated by his triumph, he paid her losses and called for champagne. The girl plied him skilfully with wine, and presently he was more drunk than he had been since the beginning of his era of prosperity.

They took a cab to the flat. Grey felt that he had reached the pinnacle of triumph. Life was wonderful, glorious ! What did anything matter now ? He was free to do as he chose !. He talked wildly to the girl, making extravagant promises, fantastic plans in which they both shared. The girl smiled to herself. This was what she wanted, a man she could manage—and a man whose money would rescue her from the sordid existence she knew and loathed.

He switched on the light and the girl crossed his threshold. The room which they entered was lavishly illuminated, the lights shaded into moderation by costly fabrics. It was barely three months since Grey had nightly lit his solitary candle in the garret over the mews : now there was probably not such a thing as a candle in the place. The room, ornate and over-furnished, reflected money. The girl gave a gasp of delight, for which Grey

could have kissed her feet. At that moment he would have cast his fortune into her lap.

In a corner, carefully screened, lay the yellow cat in its cushioned basket.

For the first time the cat seemed aware of something unusual. It stretched itself slowly and stood up, regarding them with a fierce light in its eyes, its yellowish fur rising slowly on its back and casting a weird exaggerated shadow on the wall behind.

The girl screamed.

"For God's sake, take it away!" she cried. "I can't bear it! I can't be near it! Take that damned cat away!" And she began to sob wildly, piteously, retreating towards the door.

The cat advanced towards him and began to snarl.

At this Grey lost all control and, cursing wildly, shouting bestial things at the oncoming animal, seized it by the throat. The cat struggled violently, hissing furiously and whining plaintively by turns.

"Don't—don't cry, dearie," panted Grey, holding the cat. "I'll settle this swine soon enough. Wait for me!" And he staggered through the open door.

"My God, why do men get drunk?" wailed the girl.

Grey ran through the deserted streets. The cat had subsided under the clutch of his fingers and lay inert, its yellowish fur throbbing. He scarcely knew where he was going. All he realised was an overwhelming desire to be rid of the tyranny of this wretched creature he held by the throat. He had even forgotten the match that had applied the flame, the insult to his Elise. All his pent-up irritation against this sinister beast found its outlet in his frenzied rush through the empty streets.

At last he knew where he was going. Not far from Grey's new establishment ran the Prince's canal, that dark, sluggish stream that threads its way across the fashionable residential district of the outlying West. To the canal he ran ; and without hesitation he threw the yellow cat into the water.

He stood motionless for a moment against the stone parapet breathing heavily, and dully watched the spreading tremor of the dark water beneath. Of the cat there was no sign. He turned abruptly in the direction of the flat.

The next day he realised what he had done. At first he was afraid, half hoping that the superstitious spasm of fear would pass. In vain he told himself that he was now a wealthy man, able to defy the misfortunes that befall lesser men, able to dispense with the questionable aid of mascots. A pagan idea, to think that a wretched animal could be responsible for his good fortune. He mentally upbraided himself for a fool. But a vivid picture swam before his eyes, the broken surface of a sluggish stream . . .

His nerves suffered horribly under the strain. Elise, probing the cause of his queer silences and petulant outbursts of temper, tactlessly accentuated the trouble. Every time she spoke scornfully of the yellow cat and told him how sensible he had been, he grew more and more afraid.

"Don't be childish," she said. "Why the silly cat can't do you any harm."

But that was just what he feared.

He drank, heavily; and brooded alone in the expensive flat, ignoring Elise's oft-reiterated advice to go away. He refused to remove the yellow cat's basket and cushion from the room. They began to quarrel.

"You're a coward," she taunted him. "Why don't you act like a man? Go to the tables and see for yourself that you can still win in spite of your crazy cat notions!"

At first he refused, vehemently; but it gradually dawned on him that therein lay his chance of salvation. Once let him throw down the gauntlet *and win* and his peace of mind would be assured.

That night he received a vociferous welcome on his return to the Green Baize Club.

It was as he feared. He lost steadily. He tried to persuade himself to leave the place, but the fear of being alone with this thought prevented him. He continued to lose, and panic seized him.

Then suddenly an idea came to him. Supposing the cat were still alive? Why hadn't he thought of that before? Why, there was a saying that every cat had nine lives! For all he knew it might have swum safely to the bank and got away.

His feverish impulse crystallised into action. He hurriedly left the club and beckoned urgently to a passing taxicab.

After what seemed interminable delay he reached the spot where he had madly flung the cat away from him. The stillness of the water brought home to him the futility of searching for the animal here. This was not the way to set to work.

All that night he lay awake, devising means whereby



he could recover the cat. He decided to offer a huge reward, to placard the neighbourhood in the desperate hope of finding the cat if it were still alive.

The thing preyed on his mind in the days that followed. Exhaustive inquiries failed to discover the least trace of the yellow cat.

Night after night he went to the tables, lured there by the maddening thought that if only he could win he would drug the torment and be at peace. But he lost. . . .

His money began to slide from its hold. Every night it dwindled. Grey became haggard, scarcely ate or slept, drank excessively.

And then a strange thing happened.

One night, returning home across a deserted stretch of the park, he experienced a queer, irresistible impulse to lift his feet from the grass and make for the gravel path. He resented the impulse, fought against it ; he was cold and worn out, and by cutting across the grass he would save many minutes of weary tramping. But the thing—like a mysterious blind instinct—persisted, and in the end he found himself running, treading gingerly on the sodden grass.

He did not understand why this had happened to him.

The next day Grey did not get out of his bed until late in the afternoon. Elise had been to the flat ; had knocked at the door, then rung impatiently. He had heard her but he did not move. His desire for her was dead.

He crossed the room in search of his dressing-gown, and

caught sight of himself in the glass of his wardrobe. Only then did he realise that he was clambering over the floor with his head near the carpet, his hands outstretched in front of him. He stood upright with difficulty and reached a shaking hand for brandy.

He now scarcely ate or slept. The yellow cat was an obsession. For many nights and days its image had haunted him. He tried to visualise it, and his stupor increased when he found that he could not. He could not even remember what it looked like. Yet a day ago every detail of its ugly, sinuous body had been indelibly impressed on his memory. Now it eluded him completely. He began to moan in inhuman fashion, his eyes closed, his body writhing.

It took him two hours to struggle into his clothes, and by the time he was ready to go out it was nearly dark. He crept along the street. The shops were closing. He saw nothing of them until he reached the corner, where he halted abruptly, with a queer sensation of intense hunger. On the cold marble before him lay unappetising slabs of raw fish. His body began to quiver with suppressed desire. Another moment and nothing could have prevented him seizing the fish in his bare hands, when the shutters of the shop dropped noisily across the front of the sloping marble surface. Through the aperture a man looked at him curiously for a moment and then went on with his work.

Grey knew that something had happened, that he was very ill. Now that he could not see the vision of the yellow cat, his mind was a blank. Somehow he retraced his footsteps and got back to his room.

The bottle of brandy stood where he had left it. He

had not turned on the light, but he could see it plainly. He dragged it to his lips.

With a crash it went to the floor, while Grey leapt into the air, savage with nausea. He felt that he was choking. With an effort he pulled himself together, to find that it was beyond his power to stop the ghastly whining sound that issued from his lips. He tried to lift himself on to the bed, but in sheer exhaustion collapsed on the floor, where he lay still in an attitude not human.

The room lightened with the dawn, and a new day passed before the thing on the floor moved. Something of the clarity of vision which comes to starving men now possessed him. He stared at his hands.

The fingers seemed to have withered; the nails had almost disappeared, leaving a narrow streak of hornish substance forming in their place. He tore himself frantically towards the window. In the fading light he saw that the backs of his hands were covered with a thin, almost invisible surface of coarse, yellowish fur.

He tried to scream, but his voice seemed to be weighted down to a thin, piercing sort of wail.

Unimaginable horrors seized him. He knew now that the scarlet thread of his brain was being stretched to breaking-point. Presently it would snap. . . .

Unless—unless. The yellow cat alone could save him. To this last human thought he clung in an agony of terror.

Unconscious of movement, he crept swiftly into the street, his shapeless eyes peering in the darkness which surrounded him. He groped his way stealthily towards the one place which the last remnant of his brain told him might yield the secret of his agony.

Down the silent bank he scrambled headlong, towards the still water. The moon's pale radiance threw his shadow into a grotesque pattern. On the edge of the canal he halted, his hands embedded in the sticky, crumbling earth, his head shaking, his eyes searching in agonised appeal into the depths of the motionless water.

There he crouched, searching, searching. . . .

And there in the water he saw the yellow cat. Its flattened head shaped itself on the surface of the water; its sinister amber eyes peered close into his own; its coarse yellowish fur matched the outline of his shoulders as he bent over the still water.

He stretched out the things that were his arms, while the yellow cat stretched out its claws to enfold him in the broken mirror of the water.

### *Notes on "The Yellow Cat"*

Some years ago, over tankards of Fleet Street beer, a discussion arose one evening about short stories and "inspiration." Without denying the value of a happy idea, I well remember urging the importance of necessity. "Any writer worth his salt," said I, "can produce a short story with the rent to pay." Replied someone, "Even if he hasn't an idea in his head?" I went further. "Given pen and paper, and a subject, any self-respecting writer can produce a saleable story in a few hours."

Of course I was promptly challenged. As I have always been peculiarly fond of cats, and fonder still of talking about my own smooth-haired orange, the challenge came pat. So, emptying my tankard, I cheerfully undertook to write a story the very next day about a yellow cat.

I confess it didn't look so easy the next morning. During the day I pursued ideas in vain. So it came to pass that I sat down at my desk that evening with absolutely no ideas at all. It was Laurence Sterne, I think, who admitted he wrote one word

and relied on Providence for the next. So, following his bad example, I relied on Providence, and began to write.

I had, I repeat, no pre-conceived plan. In the first paragraph I introduced the cat. Association of ideas was probably responsible for the gambler—yellow cat—black cat—mascot. The story, such as it is, wrote itself. Inevitably it was *picaresque* in form.

It is not a good specimen of the mystery story, but it will serve as an illustration of what can be done under pressure. It would have been playing for safety to write a pleasant story, with jolly characters, using the cat as a *deus ex machina*. The market for mystery stories is limited. But having written it I had to trust to luck. If the *Mystery-Story Magazine* had refused it, I should almost certainly not have sold it elsewhere. It is too gruesome for the ordinary fiction magazines.

There is little of technical interest in "The Yellow Cat." Having struck a depressing note in the opening paragraph, I instinctively followed that trail (if I may mix metaphors) throughout the story. Re-reading the story I am struck by the preponderance of adjectives and adverbs (there are far too many of them) denoting unpleasantness. Almost at random I take the following from the story's beginning: *Strange, famished, dejectedly, depressing, piteous, half-threatening, melancholy, impatient, savage, wretched, greasy, misty, raw, damp*. Although I have undoubtedly overdone it, the elementary trick of creating atmosphere lies in these early phrases. The reader at any rate knows what to expect!

The plot (if the story can be said to have a plot) formulated itself as I wrote and the story took shape very rapidly. The ending, however, was a problem. I hesitated for some time before deciding on it. The tale had become so unreal, and patently absurd, that a fantastic flourish at the end seemed the only possibility.

So I finished it off, went round the following day to see the editor of the *Mystery-Story Magazine*, took him out, bought him a drink, and handed him the MS. I think the drink did the trick.

## REVELATION \*

"I'm so happy, Dick," said Sylvia. "You are, too, aren't you?"

Dick Venner passed his hand across his eyes with that quick nervous gesture she knew so well. He looked at her broodingly, almost sombrely, for a moment before he said :

"Of course I am. I'm glad you're happy, Sylvia."

"We must tell Doctor Morison," she said.

He crossed to the window and watched the dog Peter sleepily snapping at flies in the sun

"I suppose we must."

"Darling," she said after a pause, "you don't really think he won't be pleased? I realise what a tremendous friend he's been to you, but I think he likes me a little."

"He's glad," said Dick in a low voice, as he turned again to the window.

"I'll get the car out," she went on. "Let's go over and have tea with him. It will do you good. Shall we?"

She acknowledged his nod with a hasty kiss, and hurried off to get the car. She was followed by the excited Peter, galvanised into doggy noise and activity by the evident prospect of excursion.

She smiled tenderly to herself as she thought of Dick and how always it was she who had to take the initiative. Poor, dear Dick! The war was so long ago that most people had forgotten it. Those who had not preferred to forget it—if they could. And Dick couldn't. *His* wounds would never heal. Even Morison—sympathetic and patient—shook his head gravely when she had last tackled him on the subject.

"It's hard to say," he had told her. "I can diagnose his trouble but I can't cure it. Only one doctor can—the greatest doctor of all. Time may do the trick. And happiness," he had added, with an understanding smile.

Sylvia's philosophy was laughter not tears. She had tackled her problem with courage and a cheerful smile. She and Dick had always been pals. Looking back, she would have said she had loved him always. She did not know it until that tragic autumn afternoon when she had been allowed to see Dick in hospital. She would never forget the shock of that afternoon, and the sudden, blinding revelation of her love.

From that day she had taken command of the situation. Patiently—what an infinity of patience she had needed!—she had cared for him, protected him from the devastating irritation of everyday trifles, mothered him with an absorbing love. How comforted she was when he had turned to her. Gradually the chaos of his mind subsided, nightmare faded away before her cheerful exertions. Terror had given place to restlessness, his obsessions reduced to mere waywardness. A detached observer would have said that she had triumphed. But Sylvia knew

No sigh escaped her as she set about getting the car

into action. It was an ancient piece of machinery which she herself had christened the Casserole. Experienced mechanics flinched before it. But Sylvia knew and trusted the old bus. It wasn't fast, but it was safe. It had to be safe, for Dick.

She found herself hoping that Dick would be able to drive one day soon. He had always been keen in the old days. Now it was she who did everything for them both. Increasingly she had taken charge of all Dick's affairs. There were unkind people, of course, who hinted that Dick ought to have married her long ago. For Dick's sake she ignored the gossip, although it jarred her proud and sensitive spirit. Dick had asked her to marry him two years ago, but she had refused. In her heart she knew that this had been just a fumbling expression of his gratitude. He hadn't really loved her then. But now it was different. She was glad she had waited.

"In two weeks we shall be married," sang her heart as she worked. "In two weeks."

She was confident about the future. Dick was going to be happy, and well. Her devotion was boundless; no one knew that better than she. Only at times did doubt assail her. Then she knew that Dick's mind was still a fluttering, uncaught thing. He would sit and stare past her at something unseen. Or he would rage at her, suddenly, inexplicably; implore her to leave him alone. A cold, rigid band seemed then to press down on her heart. But the mood would pass and she would cease to be afraid.

When they were married she would finally exorcise the mischief that still possessed his poor, tortured spirit.



In her arms he would at last be free. She had done so much, she surely would not fail in the last stride.

She drove the car slowly to the house. Dick was waiting for her, leaning against the gate. His quick smile of welcome gladdened her heart. He caressed the dog and settled down comfortably beside her in the dilapidated seat.

They found Morison in his garden, walking, book in hand, among his rose trees. A younger man would have turned more eagerly to welcome them; Morison took off his glasses, and smilingly stood there to await their coming. A remarkable man, this Morison, doctor of medicine: tall, frail, with fine grey hair and keen grey eyes.

No conventional greeting passed between them. Morison looked from one to the other, encouragingly.

"Shaw again?" laughed Sylvia, noting the book in his hand. "*Not The Doctor's Dilemma?*"

"Yes. The preface is such good reading." His deep voice held a note of amusement. "It almost makes me want to practise again."

"Why don't you?" said Dick abruptly.

"No, my dear boy. If you like, I am too selfish. Or too cynical. One can do so little, you see, that is worth while. I prefer my rose trees, and my friends."

There was a pause. Morison laid down his book and looked at them again, a whimsical smile hovering on his sensitive mouth.

"I'll order tea," he said, "and you can tell me your news—if I haven't guessed it already. When is it to be?"

"I'm glad, uncommonly glad," he said, when Sylvia had told him, "and I congratulate you both, Dick

especially. You won't mind," he added, turning to Sylvia, "if I have a word with Dick while he's here? I see so little of him now, you know."

He spoke lightly, but Dick stopped aimlessly swinging his stick, and stiffened.

"Of course not," said Sylvia hastily. "Peter and I will amuse ourselves till tea comes and leave you to talk."

She whistled eagerly to the dog, and with a wave of the hand ran lightly down the mossy path towards the orchard, her bobbed hair glinting in the sun.

The two men stood for a moment looking after her. Then Morison turned to Dick.

"Well, the time has come," he said. "What are you going to do?"

There was a silence. Dick stabbed at the ground with his foot, watching the earthy cavity the toe of his shoe was making. Presently he looked up.

"I can't tell her," he said tonelessly. "It's no good. I can't."

"But don't you think, my dear boy," said Morison gently, "that you owe it to her?" Dick made no reply, and he went on, "She will believe in your innocence. You have trusted me—can't you trust her?"

"It isn't that," said Dick emotionally. "Don't you see I *can't* explain? She thinks I have never—never had anything to do with a woman before. How can I tell her now? She will never believe after all these years that I didn't——"

He stopped abruptly and held out his hand. The gesture was eloquent. Morison put his arm round Dick's shoulder.

"We needn't go over the same ground again," he said. "It isn't too late even now to make a clean breast of the whole sorry business, if you want to. It hurts me to see it still preying on your mind like this."

Dick stared at him. When he spoke there was anguish in his voice.

"I wish to God I could," he cried. "But I can't face it. I couldn't bear Sylvia to know. I—I can't tell you how I feel about her."

In the older man's eyes there was the light of understanding.

"Would it help you if I told her?"

"No!" His voice rang out piteously. "You promised me, you——"

"All right, Dick. I haven't forgotten. Don't let's talk of it any more." To himself he said: "He must work out his own salvation, poor chap."

They talked of other things, of roses, of the plans Sylvia had made. When Sylvia rejoined them, Dick was talking with unusual animation about the future, and the work he was going to do. It was only when they took their leave of Morison that he relapsed into the moody silence with which Sylvia was so familiar.

A fortnight later they were quietly married. Morison, an aunt of Sylvia's, and a few villagers who evidently regarded attendance at weddings as their traditional privilege, were the only people in the little church that peaceful sunny morning.

Afterwards they climbed into the ramshackle car and headed south. Dick disliked the fuss of preparations, so it devolved upon Sylvia to make all their arrangements

He had willingly left it to her, and she had at once made up her mind to go to a little Sussex inn she had known and loved in the days before she knew Dick. She was certain he would like it, and laughingly kept their destination a secret.

They bowled along in merry style, Dick in a subdued mood but plainly happy, the dog Peter enormously thrilled by the adventure of their journey, and Sylvia quietly elated and busy with her thoughts.

It was odd, she reflected, that Morison had frowned at the idea of their going away like this. She was positively sure he had wanted her to take Dick elsewhere. Yet he admitted he did not know that part of the country. And what could he have meant by his insistence that Dick would be better at home? He had instantly and smilingly recovered himself with a "But, of course, it's for you to decide." It was rather queer, though, she thought, how her determination to go to the Checkerboard Inn had for that brief moment startled Morison out of his customary imperturbability. Well, it was probably no business of hers

They stopped for tea at a pretty thatched-roofed cottage in a Surrey village. Dick was in high spirits, and laughed gaily through their substantial meal.

"Like the old Dick," breathed Sylvia to herself. "Just as he used to be . . . thank God."

Dick lit a cigarette and interrupted her reflections with a lazy question.

"Where are we going to, my Sylvia?"

It was the first time he had shown any curiosity as to their destination.

"Rather a wonderful place. I hope you'll think it.

I haven't been there since I was a little girl, but I remember it so well. It's miles from anywhere and we shall be quite alone."

She knew his dislike of crowds, a prejudice which as a matter of fact she cordially shared.

"We haven't got so awfully far to go now, if the Casserole holds out," she continued, putting her hand on his, "so I won't tell you any more about it. But I do hope you'll think it's a jolly place for our—honeymoon."

They were silent for a few minutes. Dick lingered contentedly over his cigarette. When he crushed the smouldering end in his saucer Sylvia put her hands on his shoulders.

"Tell me, Dick," she said "Are you really glad we are married?"

For answer he drew her tightly to him, pressing her head against his breast, and burying his face in her golden hair. Sylvia raised her face to be kissed.

"I do love you, Dick," she whispered. "And I know we're going to be happy."

They resumed their journey in happy silence. The old car seemed to be aware that it was an auspicious occasion, and was on its very best behaviour. By the time the sun had set they were within a few miles of the Checkerboard Inn.

"We're nearly there," announced Sylvia.

Dick was looking round him with troubled eyes.

"Where are we?" he said. "Are we going——"  
He checked himself as Sylvia suddenly changed gears.

The car sped smoothly down the hill. Sylvia glanced quickly at his face.

"A mile or two past Sherwood," she said briefly. "Why, what's the matter, Dick?"

He was staring uncertainly along the road ahead of them, plainly agitated.

"Why are we coming here?" he asked. Then, as they rounded the corner into the main street of the little village of Sherwood, he shrank back into his seat. "Why are you bringing me here?" His voice shook with the querulousness of a baby.

Sylvia slowed up the car, and turned to him in concern.

"Why, we won't come this way if you don't like it, Dick," she said soothingly. "I didn't know you'd ever been here before."

He stared at her, and with an effort mastered his agitation. Before he spoke he fumbled for his cigarette-case, and with fingers that shook as he held the match, lit a cigarette.

"I haven't," he said. . . . His cigarette went out, and Sylvia slowed down to a crawl to allow him to relight it. "I don't think I've ever been here before," he went on. "It was silly of me, Sylvia. I'm sorry."

At the evident contrition in his voice Sylvia felt a sensation of relief. It was just a stray mood, then, disappearing as suddenly as it came.

"We needn't stay if you don't care for it, my dear," she assured him. "But I hope you'll want to—for my sake."

By the time they pulled up outside the little Checkerboard Inn, Dick had apparently regained his good spirits.

"It's delightful, Sylvia," he said. The Checkerboard,

with its honeysuckle-covered porch and tiny latticed windows, seemed in the fading light like a toy inn. To Sylvia it brought back a flood of childhood memories.

"It's just the same, Dick," she said later, when they sat down to the cold roast beef and pickles which somehow tasted better than any food they had ever had before. "Only one thing is missing. I wish you could have seen the old landlord. He was a character. But the new one seems cheerful enough. What was he saying to you just now?"

"Nothing much," replied Dick, his eyes on his plate. "Said I reminded him of someone he used to know. Are you ready for some cheese?"

"I'm still as hungry as a hunter," she laughed. "And on my wedding day, too."

She lowered her voice as the landlord himself entered the room. From his beaming face it was plain that the Stilton he carried was his pride and joy. He deposited it with tender care on the table, stooped to pat Peter on the head, and closed the door softly behind him.

"I think Peter's hungry, too," said Sylvia presently. "I'll see about his food."

It was a beautiful night, and Sylvia found the landlord contemplating the stars. Sylvia explained Peter's fastidiousness in the matter of food. The landlord laughed.

"We shall be able to look after him," he said. "He's a grand dog. Just like his mother was at his age."

"His mother?" echoed Sylvia, astonished. "Have you ever seen Peter before?"

"Why, no, miss," said the landlord. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Venner. No, but I remember Dolly,

when Mr. Venner had her. He's forgotten me, though, by the look of it."

"I thought he'd never been here before," said Sylvia. She felt a queer tug at her heart.

"It's a good many years ago. Why, it was in the very early days of the war. I remember the trouble there was about keeping dogs in camp at that time. But Mr. Venner managed to keep Dolly with him. She was a grand bitch. Don't see many like her nowadays."

Sylvia said good night absently. Her mind was active. Surely the landlord could not be mistaken? She remembered now the many times that Dick had spoken of Dolly. And yet he had denied ever having been near Sherwood, or the Checkerboard. Poor Dick! His memory played him sad tricks sometimes. What a queer mechanism the human brain is, she thought. She sighed and dismissed the incident from her mind.

For Sylvia the next few days were unclouded happiness. Dick pottered around contentedly, smoking and reading, and tinkering with the Casserole. She watched him with maternally devoted eyes, and was glad. This was doing Dick any amount of good. How right she had been to bring him away like this, just to laze about, with no responsibility. Time enough for that, she thought. But he mustn't be allowed to be completely idle, even now.

"Dick," she called out, "I vote we go for a walk this afternoon."

He looked up from his leisurely examination of the interior of the Casserole.

"It's too hot," he said.

"Then let's take the Casserole for an airing."



"Must we?" He passed his hand across his eyes.

"Oh Dick! Look what you've done to your face."

He surveyed his grimy hand with mild amusement.

"I don't want to go out, my dear," he said.

"But I do, Dick. And you can drive."

His eyes lit up instantly, but their enthusiasm as suddenly faded. His voice was indifferent as he said:

"If you want to go, all right."

Sylvia did not allow the manner of Dick's acquiescence to affect her, but anyone not knowing Dick would have been justified in thinking him sullen and ungracious as they set out that afternoon. Sylvia, however, was content to humour him. The fact that he was willing to come was for her sufficient evidence of his love. And in this she was right.

This time the Casserole was clearly not on its best behaviour. Whether Dick's tinkering was responsible, or whether its vagaries were due merely to innate waywardness, nothing would coax it into good conduct.

"I wonder if we dare risk a course of hill-climbing," speculated Sylvia aloud. "I think I'll run her up to the chalk-pits. Then if she's behaving any better you can drive back."

Without warning Dick thrust out his hand towards the steering-wheel. The car swerved dangerously, missing the ditch by the narrowest margin.

"Dick!" cried Sylvia. "What's the matter?"

"Stop the car, stop the car!" she heard him say. Even before they were at a standstill he had jumped out into the road. His limbs trembled, and he could scarcely frame the words that raced to his lips.

"Not there! Not the chalk-pits I can't—I can't go there!"

"Darling, darling, it's all right. We'll turn back at once. There's nothing to be scared about." She had followed him into the road, and took hold of him gently by the arm. But he would not get back into the car until she had turned it round. Then he jumped in panic-stricken, and, in spite of her restraining efforts, seized the steering-wheel, pressed his foot down on the accelerator and forced the car to the utmost limit of its speed.

Sylvia not daring to move, sat there watching him with eyes that were frankly afraid. Presently, however, his panic seemed to have subsided. The pace of the car slackened; Dick was visibly regaining control of himself. In a few minutes he appeared little the worse for his outburst. The mechanical operation of driving the car seemed to restore him to his normal self.

"I'm terribly sorry, darling," he said at last. "I think the sun has made me feel a bit queer. But I feel better now."

"All right, my dear," said Sylvia, easily. "There's no harm done." But in her heart she was afraid.

They drove back to the Checkerboard without further incident. Sylvia left Dick to look after the car. She felt that for a few minutes at least she must be alone. There was some mystery in this which had to be solved, it only for the sake of her peace of mind. It wasn't as though she could ask Dick straight out what was on his mind. No, she must find out some other way. Perhaps the friendly landlord could throw some light on the mystery.

It was not until the evening that she had an opportunity of sounding him on the subject.

"The Checkerboard is agreeing with my husband," she told him. "You see, the war crocked him up pretty badly, and it's only this last year or two that he's been at all like his old self."

"I thought he looked different, somehow," said the old landlord, filling his pipe. "Shell-shock, was it, eh? Terrible thing, the war." He nodded his head gravely.

"Yes," said Sylvia, "and for a time his memory went completely. Even now he seems to have—gaps. That's probably why he didn't recognise you." She watched the old man's face anxiously. "Did you know him well in those days?"

"I can't say that." He watched the smoke from his pipe as it curled gracefully up to the timbered ceiling. "He came here once or twice, that's all. I only remember him on account of the dog. But, I'd a' known that dog anywhere, and her pup's the living spit of her."

For a few seconds he smoked in silence, while Sylvia waited. She felt uncomfortably that she was in a way spying on Dick's past. But, for his sake as well as her own, she had to know all that this man could tell her. Not that he seemed to know much.

"Let me see," he went on reminiscently. "It must be a good ten years ago. That's right, because they closed down the camp soon after the chalk-pits murder."

"The chalk-pits murder?"

"Yes. Haven't you heard of that? Why, this part of the country talked of nothing else for years. Soon after I came it happened, and a nasty business it was. It might have been an accident, but no one thinks so. They

found the body of a woman in one of the pits. Someone had done her in, and thrown her body down there. One of the soldiers from camp had done it, they all said. But they never traced him. So at the inquest they called it accidental death."

"How horrible!"

"There were some who knew the woman as said it was no more than she deserved—not that I hold with that myself. But from all accounts she was a bad 'un. They say she was nothing but a common——" He broke off, and coughed apologetically. "Sorry, miss. I nearly said something as I shouldn't. Well, it seems true enough that she was with child at the time, and folks had heard her boast that she'd kid some softy from the camp into marrying her, or paying up the brass. And they said worse things of her—but there, you know what talk is in a place like this. And I say, don't talk bad about the dead."

Sylvia was afraid to trust herself to speak. She knew she had gone deathly white. She gripped the oak chair with her hands so tightly that it seemed she must break the wood.

"I shouldn't have told you, miss," the old man was saying. "Might have known such a thing would have upset you. Let me get you a glass of something?"

Sylvia shook her head. With a desperate effort she got up from the chair. "I'm all right, thanks," she managed to say. She felt horribly sick. Her growing suspicion had swiftly crystallised into—certainty. This was the Thing that haunted Dick! Why, oh, why, had she been such a fool as to probe into what did not concern her!

She dragged herself up to her room. Every thought was torture to her. Perhaps after all she was mistaken? No sooner had the doubt framed itself in her mind than it was at once shattered by the clarity of the whole ghastly chain of events. First Dick had declared he had never been near the place before. Then his refusal to recognise the landlord—obviously to avoid any discussion of the old days. And his sudden panic at the mere thought of going near the chalk-pits!

Had Dick hugged this horror to himself all these years? It seemed wildly improbable. And yet . . . No one knew better than she the nightmare of his existence since the war. If he had, the years had been his punishment. . . .

She threw herself on the bed. When Dick came up she would—she must demand the truth. She must put her suspicion, no, accusation, into words, hard, brutal, uncompromising words.

“Did you murder that woman ten years ago?”

She shuddered violently. How could she! Even as she lay there, imagining his guilt, she knew she could never speak to him. It might destroy him, utterly. And she loved him, loved him if he had committed a hundred murders.

There came a wave of revulsion. She must be mistaken. After all, there might be a simple explanation of Dick's behaviour. More likely still, there might be no logical explanation at all. It might easily be one of his queer unaccountable impulses. What a fool she was!

The door was suddenly thrown open. Dick stood on the threshold. He looked at her wildly for a moment before speaking. His dark hair was dishevelled. His

hands, like fluttering birds, grasped and ungrasped the lapels of his coat.

"We must go at once. We must leave here. We must leave here! Do you hear me?"

His shaking voice rose to a shrill scream.

"Dick, Dick!" she implored. "Be quiet!" She struggled to her feet, and ran to him. "Tell me Dick what is wrong? Dick, Dick, tell Sylvia!"

She clung to him, her bosom heaving convulsively.

"I won't stay here," he said thickly. "Everyone talks too much. That damned landlord——"

"Dick!"

She was torn between two urgent desires, to hear no more and to hear everything—to shrink from him and yet to cling to him. She never quite knew what happened after that. Somehow it was settled that they should leave the following morning. Dick took refuge in an obstinate silence. Sylvia was afraid to talk of anything but the trivial details of their preparations for departure. Later on, perhaps, she would find an answer to the unasked question that was wracking her soul.

When she looked at Dick, and saw the haggard set of his eyes, and noted the ceaseless twitching of his lips, her heart seemed to melt within her. She must find out somehow, but she could not, she must not, speak to Dick. Instinctively she knew that that way lay disaster. The tension of his overwrought mind would snap, irrevocably.

Surely there was another way out? Through the night she searched frantically for an alternative. Then, suddenly, in the dim light of early morning, it came to her. Odd that she should not have thought before of so obvious a possibility! *Morison might know.*

She clutched desperately at the hope it offered. As soon as she got back she would go straight to him. She could scarcely control the feverish impatience that now possessed her. As she urged the car along, her eyes fixed steadfastly on the dusty winding roads, she prayed that this might prove an end to the ghastly suspense that was torturing her.

Dick must not know. He would suspect at once if he knew what she had made her mind up to do. He had always resented her going alone to Morison, pleading that he hated being discussed. Unreasonable, she thought him, now she read deeper into things, and the thought that Morison might know the truth spurred her into action.

She left Dick at the house, morose and silent, and drove the car as hard as she could to the doctor's house. To her relief he was in. His keen eyes noted her ill-suppressed agitation, but the cordial note of welcome in his voice betrayed no sign of it. He made her take off her coat and sit down. Smilingly he explained that his servants were out. Would she allow him to make some tea for her?

Sylvia shook her head. "No, thank you," she said. "I can't stay. But I had to see you." She turned to him with an imploring gesture. "It's—it's terribly important."

Morison waited for her to go on. With an effort she told him everything. It was easier than she expected. There was something in the old doctor's sympathetic grey eyes and quiet, attentive manner that shaped her thoughts into words. It did not occur to her that he might be deliberately willing her to speak and tell him

everything ; it was enough that she could have the exquisite relief of sharing the knowledge of the burden that so heavily oppressed her.

When she had finished, Morison looked at his watch.

" I think I can help you, my dear," he said. " But what I have to tell you will take a little time, and I don't think you ought to stay here too long now. Dick will be wondering what's become of you." He put his watch back in his pocket, his keen eyes regarding her shrewdly through his glasses. " Can you come and have some coffee with me after dinner ? Bring Dick, too, if he'll come."

She looked at him, surprised. He smiled reassuringly.

" I don't somehow think he will," he said. " I know my Dick. But try and persuade him to come."

" I want—most desperately—to know. But I'll try and wait patiently until then."

" Of course. And I think you will be satisfied." He opened the door for her, and patted her shoulder reassuringly as she went out.

She found Dick anxiously awaiting her

" Darling," he said, " you've had a rotten time, and it's all my fault. I am a cad to have spoiled your—your holiday like that."

" Poor Dick. You couldn't help it, I know. I understand."

" Do you ? Do you really think you do ? " He looked at her piteously.

" Doctor Morison wants us to go along after dinner," she said, watching him closely. " You will come, won't you—to please me ? "



He hesitated. "Yes," he said slowly, "if it will please you."

But in the end Sylvia went alone. Morison regarded her thoughtfully when she explained that Dick had a headache and couldn't come. For a while he talked about his rose trees. Sylvia left her coffee untouched, waiting.

"Now, my dear, this little trouble of yours," he said at last. It seemed to Sylvia that he had come to a decision of some kind. "I'm glad you came to me because, as it happens, I can help you. The worry you have had shows what an awful and misleading thing circumstantial evidence is." He paused. "I don't blame you, Sylvia; in your place I should probably have jumped to the same conclusion."

"Then I was wrong?" said Sylvia quietly.

"Completely." He put down his cup. "Now, don't misunderstand me, Sylvia. Dick ought never to have been a soldier. Certainly not a machine-gunner. Not that he was a coward, or physically unfit. But he was temperamentally, mentally unfit. He didn't realise what he was in for. More coffee?"

He pointed inquiringly at her cup.

Sylvia shook her head. She took her cup and sipped at the cold, bitter liquid.

"All went well for a time. Training didn't hurt him. It was only when he got out to France that the mischief started." He paused again. "Ninety-nine men out of a hundred, Sylvia, can kill a man in battle without damaging their nervous systems. The hundredth suffers, for the moment, the tortures of the damned. Even so, such a man's system usually survives the injury.

The human body's power of recovery is remarkable. But once in a while you come across a human organism which is infinitely more sensitive. Dick unfortunately is in that case."

"But the chalk-pits?" she said tensely. Under her close scrutiny he went on.

"It happened like this. Dick went out to France at the end of June 1916. His division was suddenly swept into the Somme attack which we launched on July the first. Dick had proved himself a first-class shot on the ranges at home, and he held pride of place in his gun team. He was the man who actually fired the gun.

"Some men had months in the front line without even seeing a German. The first time Dick saw the enemy, there were no less than a hundred of them before his eyes, lining up in a chalk-pit, organising for a counter-attack. His gun position enfiladed the bottom edge of the pit.

"Dick opened fire. His aim was true. Two or three bursts and most of the wretched fellows lay writhing or still. It must have been ghastly. Mercifully, a shell put Dick temporarily out of action, and probably saved him from breaking down under the strain and shock of it all. He was sent home, and as you know I took charge of him."

"Poor, poor Dick," breathed Sylvia.

"So you see why it is that a chalk-pit is—poor chap!—an obsession with him. Now I want you to tell him that I have told you what it is that was on his mind. You see, I have broken my promise to him—for his own sake, tell him. You will remember, won't you? Tell him I have told you everything."

Morison took a cigarette out of his satinwood box at his elbow and lit it.

"It's not a thing to discuss with him. I know you understand that. In fact, it wouldn't be too much to say that your happiness depends on—your silence on this particular point." He smiled easily, and inhaled his cigarette appreciatively. "But the important thing is that Dick should know that you know."

"My poor Dick," said Sylvia softly.

"You know that he will never discuss the war," said Morison. "That is why."

"I knew he could not have done anything—really wrong," said Sylvia slowly. "And I knew you would tell me"—she paused imperceptibly—"the truth. You have taken a weight off my mind." She paused again. "Dick is lucky to have you for a friend," she said.

For a brief second their eyes met.

"I want you both to be happy," said Morison. "Now run along home—but dry your eyes before you get there."

A few hours later, in the darkness of their room, Sylvia told Dick.

"He broke his promise for your sake," she whispered to him. "He knew that I would—understand."

"And—and you still love me?" he said brokenly. "In spite of everything?"

She answered him silently with her lips. Presently she said, "We'll never talk about it, Dick, never again. I understand." To herself she added, "Better than anyone knows."

Dick sighed contentedly. In the darkness Sylvia held out her arms.

*Note on "Revelation"*

If I seem to dwell on the origins of these stories it is not in any reminiscent spirit but rather with the intention of indicating how the short story "germ" enters the system. It is true, I think, that after we have concentrated for some years on the finding of plots and ideas, our subconscious mind carries on the good work automatically. Without realising it perhaps, we see fragments of our experience from the short story angle; and we proceed to select and discard accordingly. Some odd incident—maybe only a scrap of conversation—will suggest a short story. At first it is not properly in focus, it may fade away or gradually take shape in our mind, until we recognise it as an embryo short story.

The idea of "Revelation" came to me when I was walking alone over Beachy Head. I cannot rid myself of the old war-time habit of mentally choosing machine-gun emplacements (the subconscious mind again). Perhaps the idea of wiring the more dangerous places helped to provide the mental associations. However, that is how my train of thought started. From cliffs my mind turned to chalk-pits; and then I found I had the germ of a story.

A sensitive spirit—the war—forced to open fire on the enemy massed in a pit—his subsequent horror of any chalk-pit. All this linked up with a murder—a woman thrown down a chalk-pit—the murderer never discovered. The "situation" grouped itself in a flash.

I did not write this story until some weeks after, and in the interval I altered it substantially. Why not, I said to myself, a problem story? Supposing he *did* kill the woman? I decided to work it out on these lines.

This at once increased the importance of Morison, the doctor. My ending was clear, the troubled Sylvia would go to Morison, Dick's old friend, for help. And he would answer her question. Therefore Morison had to be brought into the story early. I managed to introduce him in the first half-dozen lines. It was also necessary to establish early the friendship between Dick and Morison. So, two or three lines later, Sylvia refers to it.

The next piece of information essential to the reader's understanding of the story was Dick's previous history. This is slipped in conveniently, in the form of Sylvia's thoughts, as she goes to get

out the car. This 500-word chunk also had to come in early. The disadvantage of this method of telling a story is that the action remains stationary, or merely crawls along. So, as soon as possible after the introduction of Morison himself, I brought in a crisis.\*

He spoke lightly, but Dick stopped aimlessly swinging his stick and stiffened. . . . Then Morison turned to Dick.

"Well, the time has come," he said. "What are you going to do?"

The reader is then let into the secret; at least, he knows Dick has something to confess, and that Morison has promised not to tell. Thus the reader knows more than Sylvia—a little trick perhaps comparable with the familiar dramatic device of letting the audience know something of which the characters on the stage are ignorant.

From this point the story goes straight ahead. But it may be of some interest to the beginner to note that the first 1,500 words are all occupied in setting the stage. As the story runs to about 6,000 words in all, this is not an excessive proportion, but there must be always justification for devoting space to "information for the reader."

Although, as I have said, the narrative was straightforward, I encountered several problems *en route*. The first was the Checkerboard Inn difficulty. If Dick knew they were bound for it, he would obviously have wanted to go elsewhere. So I had to fall back on his state of mind—his moodiness, lack of initiative, and so on. (The ground for this was prepared in the 500-word retrospect already referred to.) It might be a useful exercise for the beginner to turn back to the beginning of the story and underline the words and phrases which reveal Dick's indifference, and, later, his agitation when he recognises the scene.

This gives birth to Sylvia's anxiety, which is increased by her subsequent talk with the landlord. Then, Dick's frantic refusal to go near the chalk-pits definitely agitates her. Finally, when she questions the landlord, she suspects the truth. Here we have the second crisis of the story.

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\* Cf. *Short Story Writing for Profit*.

The climax—her interview with Morison—needs no explanation. But because the reader already knows that Morison has promised Dick not to betray his secret, there is an element of suspense. The reader does not know (at least I hope not) what Morison is going to say to Sylvia.

I was tempted to let Sylvia believe the doctor's story. But I decided that she should guess the truth (and that Morison should know she had) partly because any woman reading the story would give Sylvia credit for that much intelligence, even if I didn't ; and also because truth will out, even in a magazine story !

## “ ROUGE ET NOIR ” \*

WISER than most women, Marthe Richoux rejoiced in her husband's poverty. Wise, too, she was, in never allowing her feelings to betray her. In her obstinate fashion she devoted herself to her gambling-mad husband. She shuddered at the thought of losing him. The prospect of ending her days alone terrified her. Her youth and what faint traces of beauty had been hers had long since gone. Only Gustave was left to her.

At first she had protested violently at the wanton dissipation of his income at the tables. That was years ago. By degrees her anger had given place to sullen acquiescence, a philosophic shrug of the shoulders, a murmured “ *A la guerre comme à la guerre.* ” She began to realise that Gustave's bad luck was her good fortune.

Marthe was no fool. She had all the *bourgeoise's* reverence for money. Her own tiny income was a sacred thing. All Gustave's frenzied pleadings for a loan she had met with cold refusal. He had long ago realised the futility of asking Marthe any favours. She was mean, the old furnace ! And he waited, desperately impatient, for the next quarterly payment of his own money.

With a wry smile somewhere inside her Marthe would watch his spirits revive as the day drew near. Then he

would draw his money from the picturesque little bank near the Casino itself, carry it home in a bag, and solemnly divide it into ten equal amounts. He was queer, like all gamblers. Superstition rode him hard. New hiding-places he would hunt for, to bring him luck.

Marthe's laughter, softened by the years, never checked him. An odd appearance he presented, too; untidy, watery-eyed, like a pallid elderly monkey, with a rapid, nervous cough and a way of looking at you as though he was thinking of something else, as he probably was. Gambling, most virulent of all the fevers, dominated him. He never acknowledged it, deluding himself—but not his wife—that his systems, gradually perfected, could not fail in the end to yield the riches his heart desired.

He grumbled unceasingly at his poverty. "If only one had the capital," he would groan, "one could become fabulously wealthy." He regarded his experiments as business propositions which languished for want of the necessary financial backing, forgetful of his sudden impulses, his superstitious inspirations.

For eight years Gustave and Marthe had lived thus on the fringe of this "jewel of the coast," as the hotel announcements described the town. Both were completely indifferent to its natural splendour, its blue skies and not less vivid seas, its radiant flowers and fashionable reputation. Gustave was indifferent to all but the lure of the tables. When the salons were closed he ceased to exist, went home, muttered "*Rouge et noir*" to Marthe's habitual inquiry as to where he had been—as though she did not know!—undressed and went to bed.

Marthe was content that he should lose. She lived in fear of the day the luck might turn. She could



picture his return, his crazy elation, his madness. In his sullen moods, he had savagely reminded her of the golden, beckoning future awaiting him. Him, not her. Once he had taunted her with her faded looks, had said something which sent a chilly stab to her heart. "A pretty woman! What would I not give for a pretty woman!"

Outwardly calm, but with her life's fear at an instant's release, she waited every day for his return from the salons. If he returned early, she breathed a sigh of relief. All was well, he had lost what he had. If she heard the hour strike when the salons closed, she waited in dread, which the passage of the years had scarcely dulled, for the sound of his footsteps on the gravel path of their ramshackle villa.

"Where have you been?" Her foolish formula was never omitted. Her husband, pale and breathing heavily, would look at her and say, "Rouge et noir." It was a sort of convention between them. He rarely spoke another word, unless by chance he had won a few hundred francs, but sipped in silence the nightly *café-cognac* Marthe never failed to prepare. As for Marthe, she ignored his muttered calculations as completely as she refrained from upbraiding him for the silence which betokened his failures.

Rouge et noir! The phrase seemed to have rung as an ironic motif through her life. It had always been rouge et noir. It always would be rouge et noir. So long as the luck—the bad luck—held.

One night the wheel turned full circle. People pointed at the funny little bearded habitué, some amused, many envious. The luck had turned with a vengeance. Crowds

followed his choice on the green baize, sooner or later to desert his incredible run of good fortune in the foolish belief that he could not possibly continue to win. Gustave savoured the miraculous thrill of the gambler. He gathered his winnings mechanically, betting to the limit with all the icy intentness of the professional. He spoke not a word. His watery eyes became hard and dilated. His hand trembled, but imperceptibly.

The luck held. When the bell rang, Gustave Richoux was a rich man. He had, after all these years, brought off his coup. He put on his scarf and coat, descended the marble steps and stood for a second breathing in the cold night air.

It was hard to realise.

"*Monsieur a bien gagné ce soir,*" said a soft voice at his elbow.

He turned. A painted face smiled invitingly at him. The gentle pressure of a hand on his arm, the gossamer contact of a fur blown by the cool breeze on his cheek, the fragrance of perfume. . . . The gates were open.

Not once did he think of Marthe that night. As a starving man will greedily assuage his hunger and thirst, he quenched his unfettered longing. His back was turned on the old miserable scraping and waiting; the glorious future opened out radiantly before his eyes. This was the life he wanted. A soft young woman, rich food and drink, comfort, luxury, freedom. In his trembling passion he drank, unthinkingly. The girl wondered cynically if he would make a beast of himself when drunk. *Tant pis!* She knew how to deal with men—no matter who they were, what their condition.

He made plans. He unfolded the panorama of the golden future, in which this girl was to share. In the darkness the girl smiled. It was going to be easier than she thought. The money might last six months and the season was nearly over

"*Quelle vie !*" she sighed reminiscently.

"*Quelle vie !*" echoed Gustave, his thoughts leaping forward.

He awoke after sleeping two hours. In the grey light he thought suddenly of Marthe. Resentfully, and rather afraid. Yet why should he be? He was free now to do what he liked. His companion was sleeping the sound sleep of those who earn their living.

He would go to the villa while she slept, collect one or two things, and finish once and for all with that mean old harriidan. Then he would return. He glanced at the sleeping girl. Her shoulder gleamed bare in the wakening light. Her face was buried pillow-deep. Her breast rose and fell steadily. Yes, she was young—and desirable.

Gustave crept from the bed, gathered his clothes, dressed quietly and rapidly outside the room. He would not waste time by tidying himself. He made his way silently into the street as dawn was breaking.

Marthe was waiting. A queen's dignity robbed her haggard figure of piteousness. She knew. Mechanically her lips framed the words "Where have you been?"

He stared at her malevolently, but did not answer. He silently cursed his impulse to return to the villa. He felt the sensation of a man who is robbed. In that pause he knew his fate. He could not escape. Tonelessly, he said :

"Rouge et noir!"

Marthe's mouth twisted in a kind of smile. She pointed at him.

"Yes. Rouge et noir! Look in the glass." She turned away. "Thy *café-cognac* is ready."

He stared into the mirror. His lips unnaturally red, his cheeks and eyelids smeared with eye-black.

*Rouge et noir!*

### *Notes on "Rouge et Noir"*

This cannot be described, by any stretch of imagination, as a magazine story. I include it in this book for another reason.

It is the kind of story which at some time or other every writer is tempted to put on paper, regardless of its market prospects. There is nothing immoral in producing obviously unsaleable fiction, yet the young writer determined to get into print commonly avoids this like the plague. Why, I don't know. It is not the writing of such stories that is to be condemned, but the attempt to sell them in patently unsuitable markets.

Nowadays the literary amateur has a glut of advice and instruction at his elbow; and I am sometimes inclined to think that this no doubt well-meant advice may lead him sadly astray; notably in its ready condemnation of "unsaleable" material.

The fact that this particular story was published does not affect the issue; it is a good specimen of the unpublishable type. When a story simply demands to be written (as this one did) then write it. Having written it, by all means survey the possible markets, but be on your guard lest optimism displace judgment. Think of the story as one which an acquaintance has asked you to place for him; if you can visualise the said acquaintance as a bore and a nuisance, so much the better. Also, reflect that you will have to spend time on it, and cash for postage. Is it worth it? Shall I bother with it—or send the MS. back to him as he suggests? That is the way to look at your own doubtful stories.

There are of course several markets for unconventional contributions and it is the writer's business to explore this

relatively unfamiliar ground. The results may prove financially to be not worth while, but there are other aspects to consider. I certainly did not write "Rouge et Noir" because my bank balance needed restoration!

Seriously, it is something in favour of the unconventional story that it sends the writer exploring markets off the beaten track. There is more scope in obscure periodicals than the average author realises. Acceptance at the hands of a provincial paper is preferable to rejection by a dozen London magazines.

In this connection it may be worth quoting the remark recently made to me by the editor of a popular fiction weekly. He said, "At almost any time in the past twelve months I would have jumped at any printable story up to five thousand words. But although we can, and do, pay as well as many of the monthly magazines very few manuscripts are submitted to my little paper. I can't find enough stuff." *Verb. sap.*!

The chief value, however, of writing unorthodox short stories is the practice it affords one. The "manufactured" short story is always an uninspired affair and, as a rule, adds nothing of value to one's experience. On the other hand, the story which is written simply because it must be written, is not likely to be machine-made. It is an affair of the spirit. Therefore get it out of your system; writing it as carefully as though it were certain of publication.

"Rouge et Noir" needs no explanation. The only point about it perhaps worth reference is the local colour. I took some pains to get this right. So often does one come across stories disfigured by sprinklings of alleged French or some other foreign language that one begins to wonder if writers have any common sense at all. The most flagrant mistakes of this kind occur in stories by even authors of reputation. Why is it? As well ask why women with leg-of-mutton shoulders and massive legs wear sleeveless dresses and conspicuously light stockings. The fallibility of human nature should be revealed objectively by the writer, not subjectively. The moment a writer is detected in a blunder the illusion is shattered. (Moreover, the reader usually writes a nasty letter to the editor about it.)

Why, it may be asked, will the fiction magazines invariably refuse a story of the type of "Rouge et Noir"? The answer, I

suspect, is—tradition. For years the magazines have regarded themselves as "family" periodicals. Their editorial policy has been to entertain, but never to give offence. In previous generations it is unquestionably true that publication of a "sex" story would have called forth a shower of indignant if not abusive letters on the editor's desk. Although the times have changed remarkably the same attitude is, I fancy, more prevalent than some of us suppose. There are still old-fashioned parents whose prejudices can be offended, and who are determined to shield their innocent children from contact with vile publications. I think the magazine editors are right. In their eyes the minimum of offence equals the maximum of sales ; and the magazine public is still curiously old-fashioned.

## THE LAST CHANCE \*

"I THINK you're a fool, Craig," said George Navarin.

The two trainers faced each other across the table. Patrick Craig, known affectionately throughout the racing world as "Pat," stared uncompromisingly at the rows of prints of famous horses on the wall behind his prosperous rival's back.

"I'm obliged to you for your offer," he said, "but I'm not amalgamating. For thirty years now I've run my little stable my own way and if I'm finished I'll sell out. You don't run your horses my way, Navarin," he added bluntly.

"Not such a fool," laughed the other, unpleasantly. "Well, I've given you a chance most people would call generous. You can tell your daughter the offer's still open," he said significantly, as Pat rose to go.

Pat did not answer. He knew that Mollie would support him in rejecting Navarin's proposal. He bade Navarin a curt farewell, swung into the saddle with the old easy grace that had never deserted him, despite his fifty odd years. He decided to return home the longer way round, over the Downs. It would give him an opportunity to think things over before he saw Mollie.

He had to face an unpleasant situation. Ever since the war he had struggled valiantly to restore the former prosperity of the training stables he controlled. But conditions all along had been dead against the small trainer, especially if he had scruples. He had only a few horses in training and their number had steadily diminished. The new type of owner, thought Craig bitterly, preferred the glamour of the big fashionable stables. Expenses were enormous and he had had a long period of bad luck. He did not complain about that, anyway, but he knew what bad luck meant to a trainer of racehorses.

And now he was at the end of his tether. To make matters worse, George Navarin, plainly with an eye to future possibilities, had secured an option on the lease of his land, which he could exercise if the Craigs did not renew. The unpalatable fact was that Craig could not afford to renew, and Navarin knew it.

Yet Navarin had offered him—amalgamation. In plain English he was willing to spare Craig the humiliation of failure in the world's eyes. Navarin was not the type of man to do something for nothing. Pat knew well enough what he wanted. And so did Mollie.

Pat could not pretend to be sorry that Mollie loathed Navarin. The loyal affection which existed between him and his motherless daughter was strengthened by Mollie's downright refusal to listen to Navarin's persistent proposals of marriage.

With a clear conscience—although it meant the end of all his cherished ambitions—he was glad that Mollie stood firm. The thought crossed his mind that Mollie might waver when she knew the real seriousness of their position. But only for a moment. He knew Mollie.



He cantered slowly across the wide green sweep of the Downs, reflecting that the exhilaration of early morning gallops with his own string of horses would soon belong to the past. Imperceptibly he urged his mount into a gallop, as if to shake off his despondency.

He was riding a six-year-old mare, a great favourite of Mollie's. It was Mollie who had persuaded him to take Dark Cherry out of training and use her as a hack. Her coat shone resplendently, the muscles rippling smoothly under the mare's satin-like skin. Like all Pat Craig's horses, she looked a picture of health.

Dark Cherry responded effortlessly to the gentle pressure of her rider's knees, seemingly enjoying the smooth gallop as much as Pat.

"You've still got your speed, you beauty," he said aloud.

They pulled up a few minutes later outside the white gate which marked the entrance to the Redcrest stables, named after the horse that had so gallantly won the Cesarewitch for Pat Craig's father some thirty years before.

A girlish figure in a white silk blouse, with neatly cut breeches and riding boots, ran forward to welcome them. It was Mollie. She was not tall, nor would you call her conventionally beautiful, but there was an irresistible charm about the slight irregularity of her features which was decidedly more attractive. Pat Craig thought so, at any rate. He adored his daughter. His heart sank at the prospect of breaking the news to her.

A quick glance at his face told Mollie all she wished to know. Handing Dark Cherry's bridle to a diminutive

stable-lad, she took her father's arm and together they crossed the yard towards the house.

In a few words Pat disclosed their position. "But it will be all right, dear," he said. "I shall have to manage someone else's horses for a while, that's all."

They were silent for a moment, both of them thinking the same thing, that it wasn't so easy nowadays.

"Let's see how we stand," said Mollie practically. They plunged into a discussion of ways and means, surveying one by one the few horses in their charge and their prospects of bringing grist to the mill within the three months left to them. They had been over the same ground many times before, but Mollie was preoccupied for another reason.

She was thinking of George Navarin. She knew it was useless suggesting to Pat that she should save the situation by marrying a man she disliked. But the conviction was steadily growing on her, as she thought of what it meant to her father, that that was what she would do, if all else failed.

"Then there's Rameses . . . and that's all," her father was saying, "except your ponies and Dark Cherry. And they can't very well win a race," he added, with an attempt at a cheerful smile.

Mollie jumped up.

"Why not?" she said, a sudden light in her blue eyes, "why not? . . . Put Dark Cherry back into training!"

Pat smiled ruefully.

"There isn't time, my dear. What could she win?"

Mollie pointed to the racing almanack on the wall.

"The Cesarewitch," she said.

"Mollie dear!" protested Pat. "It's—it's out of the question. We couldn't give her a preparation in the time. And besides——"

"Listen, father dear," said Mollie quietly. "The entries close this week. Cherry thrives on light work. She's in the pink of condition. Her speed is as good as ever." ("That's true enough," he put in.) "And I believe she could stay the distance. It's a sporting chance. Will you take it?"

Pat hesitated a moment. Then:

"It's almost an unheard-of thing to put a hack back into training for an important race like the Cesarewitch," he said slowly, "but we're up against it, and I'll take the chance right enough. We'll try her out to-morrow morning, Mollie.

"And now for breakfast. Mollie mine," said Pat Craig. There was a decidedly more cheerful ring in his voice. The cloudless sky was deepening into blue as the sun warmed up to his work on this bright August morning. Early morning gallops were over.

Craig and Mollie had "tried out" Dark Cherry. With little Everitt in the saddle, Dark Cherry had been given a rousing mile and a half gallop, led by Rameses, a gelding who, as Pat said, could be trusted to tell them "the time o' day."

The result was eminently satisfactory. Dark Cherry had "pulled over" the other all the way and finished in capital trim. It was in no sense a regular trial, and Craig, who knew his job, fully realised that there was much to do before Cherry was fit to race in the great Newmarket handicap. Theirs was still "only an outside chance," he warned Mollie.

But Mollie's elation was not to be denied. It was enough for her that they had a sporting chance of success. And as for Navarin—well, she would not think of him—not yet, at any rate.

She had dismounted, and danced along gaily at her father's side. Craig beckoned the head lad to join them, leaving one of the stable-boys to bring up the rear with the horses.

Jack Edison, whose affection for Cherry rivalled that of Mollie and her father, vaulted lightly into the saddle and walked the mare alongside.

"Don't trust her to stable-boys," he said with a frank smile, "not now, sir, anyway."

They had no secrets from Jack Edison. He shared their good times and their bad. Ever since, ten years before, he had come straight from school to Redcrest, Craig, who was no mean judge of men, had liked and trusted Jack. Mollie liked him, too, and Craig had hoped that their boy and girl friendship might develop into something deeper. But somehow, since the war, when Jack was soldiering, Mollie had rather avoided him, it seemed. A pity, thought Craig.

"What do you think, Jack?" he said. "Have we any chance?"

"Can't tell yet, sir," was the reply. "It's a pity we haven't any good trial tackle. We shall want it later."

Craig pondered. He knew that Edison was right; presently, they would have to test Dark Cherry's abilities against a proved stayer, for stamina was essential to win the Cesarewitch and they were not sure as yet of the mare's staying power, which meant borrowing a horse from another trainer.

"We can arrange it," he said, at length.

At the white gate they separated, Jack taking charge of the horses as they came in.

"Marshall's a good friend of ours," said Craig over the breakfast table a little later. "I'll fix it with him."

Mollie, her healthy appetite doing ample justice to fried eggs and bacon, was content to leave it at that. She liked Marshall, the genial white-whiskered veteran, whose judgment was as shrewd as it had been in her grandfather's time. But as she nodded her approval the telephone-bell suddenly rang.

Craig reappeared from the little study a few minutes later.

"It's about the lease," he explained. "I shall have to go up to London again. It's a nuisance, but it can't be helped. Will you go and see Marshall for me, dear?"

"Of course I will," said Mollie. "I'll go this very afternoon."

It is not far from Redcrest to the imposing Navarin stables, as the crow flies. Nor is it impossible, with the aid of powerful Zeiss field-glasses, to bring one place within your vision if you happen to be standing in the other. Consequently, it happened that Mr. George Navarin, a few hours later, witnessed the unusual sight of his despised rival, Pat Craig, stepping into the station Ford, *en route* for the London train.

Which may, or may not, have been the reason why George Navarin elected to pay a visit to Redcrest that afternoon. He took matters easily, cantering across the Downs, as if well satisfied that it was only a matter of time before Redcrest fell into his hands, and with it the charming Mollie Craig.

He drew up at Redcrest, threw the reins to one of the stable-boys and walked round to the back of the house with the idea of taking Mollie unawares. He was just framing the glib excuse that he was looking for her father when Mollie's voice arrested his attention. George Navarin had no scruples ; he stood still and listened.

" Is that you, Mr. Marshall ? " she was saying. " It's Mollie Craig here. You remember Dark Cherry, whom Father took out of training ! Well, we think we can win the Cesarewitch with her and we want . . . "

Navarin listened more intently than ever. He was decidedly glad he had journeyed over to Redcrest. When he had heard all he wanted to know, he quietly retraced his footsteps. With a curt word of explanation to the waiting boy—" I find Mr. Craig's out," he said—he turned his horse on to the road. Certainly his time hadn't been wasted.

For the next few weeks, the hopes and anxieties of the Redcrest stable were all centred on the progress of Dark Cherry. Jack Edison who rode the mare in most of her gallops became more and more imbued with enthusiasm for the horse's chance as time went on. Craig was quietly cheerful ; Mollie was openly optimistic. Tim Everitt, the light-weight jockey who was to have the mount in the race, was keenly looking forward to the great day.

Everything was going well.

Dark Cherry's name had duly appeared among the entries and Redcrest awaited the publication of the weights with ill-concealed anxiety.

" On form she ought to be let off lightly," said Pat, " but the handicapper—you never know."

"Between seven stone and seven stone six," prophesied Jack.

"Not a pound more than seven stone," declared Mollie confidently.

Mollie was nearest. Dark Cherry was allotted exactly seven stone.

"Well, Tim Everitt can do the weight comfortably enough," commented Pat, as he went to the telephone to arrange with Marshall the details of the mixed trial they had agreed upon.

Meanwhile, every sign of activity at Redcrest was duly reported to George Navarin. He paid his spies well. And so, very early one morning towards the end of September, when a horse-box was got ready for the road, Navarin got ready too.

A motor-cyclist followed them to Marshall's training ground by the simple expedient of getting there first. The trial that followed in the hour after dawn was, in consequence, witnessed by a hidden pair of eyes in the service of George Navarin.

There were five horses in the trial, four of Marshall's and Dark Cherry. Two of Marshall's horses were also entered for the Cesarewitch and carried the weights allotted to them in the handicap. One of them, Featherspray, was generally considered to have, on proved form, a great chance of winning the race.

"I admire your pluck, Pat," said old Marshall, as the five horses lined up on the track. "But your horse'll never beat mine at the weights."

But the veteran trainer was wrong. Dark Cherry led all the way, winning in a canter from Featherspray by a good ten lengths.

"Pat," said Marshall, "I congratulate you. You can win that race, or I know nothing about racing." He held out his stopwatch. "I've 'clocked' her—look at the time for yourself."

Pat looked, and smiled at Mollie.

"It's good to see that smile again," thought Mollie. Then aloud, she cried, "Well done, Tim," as the boy, red with excitement, came up to don the overcoat which always seemed several sizes too large for him.

They adjourned to Marshall's house for rolls and hot coffee and a brief council of war. At Marshall's suggestion it was agreed that Dark Cherry should not be backed until a few days before the race.

"We can afford to wait," he said. "Betting isn't what it used to be. To put on a few hundred pounds now would make the mare favourite. When some of the others have been backed we can step in. And we ought to be able to get sixty-six to one to our money."

For a few minutes the discussion became technical, then Mollie and her father took their leave.

"A good morning's work," was Pat's comment as they strode along the gravel path.

"A fine lass, that," was old Marshall's unspoken thought, as he gazed admiringly after her lithe figure, which was no negligible opinion, coming as it did from a man who prided himself on being as good a judge of a pretty face as of a thoroughbred racehorse.

"Only a week to go," said Mollie.

Pat threw away his half-smoked cigarette. The strain was beginning to tell. So far everything had gone as well as they could have hoped. But so much depended



on it—they dared not admit how much even to each other—and the slightest hitch would probably mean the dashing of all their hopes. Despite his many years of experience in a hard school, Pat Craig was plainly anxious.

They began to talk figures. Craig had decided to risk every available sovereign that was left backing Dark Cherry to win the Cesarewitch.

If she won, all their troubles would vanish. They would win, in racing parlance, "a small fortune." They would need it, too, to get clear and find the capital necessary for the future. Craig had not revealed even to Mollie the full gravity of their present position. If she lost, well, he would have just enough left to pay off all their debts. He would owe no man a penny, and they would have to start afresh. He made—for the twentieth time—calculations which only served to heighten their anxiety.

"If we get, to-morrow, as we should, sixty-six and fifties to our money, then, with the stake as well——"

"Don't count your chickens, please, father dear," pleaded Mollie. "We shall soon know——"

The telephone-bell rang sharply.

Craig took off the receiver. It was Marshall.

"There's dirty work somewhere," said Marshall's voice at the other end of the wire. "Somebody's been talking, Craig. I've had inquiries made—and we can't get more than twelves about your mare. Who's been backing her?"

Craig went white. "I'll come over," he said.

At first Mollie could not understand the significance of this unforeseen development. Although passionately

devoted to horses she took little interest in the business side of racing. Craig explained.

"We're beaten, Mollie, that's what it means. In the story-books, the horse is doped, or spirited away. But this is the real thing. Somebody who knew our secret has got in before us and backed our horse. And now we can only get short odds. With this backing Dark Cherry will be nearly favourite on the day."

Mollie tried to console him. "We can still win the race," she argued, "even if we don't win so much."

Craig shook his head.

"We need the money," was all he said. He envied Mollie, who could think only of Dark Cherry and the race; he was thinking of the future.

Marshall and Pat Craig had an anxious hour's discussion that evening. The two trainers trusted each other implicitly and there was no shadow of suspicion between them. The racing profession counts two extremes in its ranks, the most honourable as well as, unfortunately, the most dishonourable.

They decided to hold their hand until the day of the race.

"Cheer up, Pat," said Marshall, as they parted. "Many things can happen between now and next Wednesday."

Many things did. On the Tuesday evening a few hours before the race, Tim Everitt broke his arm. There was no question of foul play; a swinging stable door and the damage was done.

Only Pat fully realised what a tragedy it was. He made desperately hurried inquiries, only to find that there was hardly a jockey of ability available who could

do the weight. In any case no light-weight jockey could take Tim Everitt's place; he knew the horse, and the horse knew him.

He found time, all the same, to go and see the unlucky Tim, and commiserate with the lad on his disappointment. The boy never gave a thought to his injured arm; all his grief centred in the opportunity of which a malign fate had deprived him.

"Never mind, Tim," said Pat, with a cheering smile. "We'll win the race next year as well and you shall have the mount then."

Mollie was nearly frantic. That night she scarcely slept at all.

The morning of the great race dawned and Dark Cherry was still without a jockey. The news of Tim's accident had spread abroad with all the swiftness of rumour.

Newmarket Heath presented its usual busy state that morning. Craig was early abroad, still not without hope that he could find a substitute jockey in the time. But the outlook was black.

Marshall greeted him sympathetically.

"I shouldn't risk too much on your horse now, Pat," he advised. "I'm going to run Featherspray, and back him, too. I hope you win, though."

Marshall was obviously sincere. He bent down and whispered something into Pat's ear.

"Navarin!" repeated Pat slowly. "So that's who backed Dark Cherry. I wonder . . ."

But there was no time for speculation. He hastened to rejoin Mollie and Jack Edison.

The three of them reviewed the situation. Craig summed it up in a few words.

"We shall have to risk an inexperienced jockey," he said. "We've got the choice of——"

He began to run through a few names, when Mollie cried aloud in excitement :

"Jack!" she burst out. "Why not give Jack the mount? He knows Cherry——"

"My dear," said her father patiently, "he can't do anything like the weight. He can't ride under eight stone. It's absurd."

"It isn't, it isn't," she cried. "If we put up a stone overweight, I *know* we can still win. And," she went on excitedly, "won't that mean the odds will go out, and we can get the long price you wanted?"

Jack rallied to her support.

"I believe she's right, sir," he volunteered. "I can go to scale at eight stone, or a very little over, and I still think we can win. And my riding licence is all right. It's an inspiration, sir."

Pat was unconvinced.

"It's unheard of," he said. "A stone or more overweight! People will think us mad!"

"Let them," declared Mollie, her blue eyes sparkling. "It's our chance, our last chance!"

That turned the scale. "I'll do it," said Pat.

It was a day of sensations. The news spread like wildfire that Pat Craig was "putting up" Jack Edison on Dark Cherry and declaring about sixteen pounds overweight. On all sides, as Pat had prophesied, people openly expressed the opinion that he was crazy. The odds against Dark Cherry lengthened to twenties, forties, fifties, when the numbers went into the frame and it was seen that the rumour was correct.

Then the Redcrest stable got busy. They took as much as a hundred to one, then sixty-six, and the remainder of their commission went on at fifties.

Meanwhile George Navarin was equally busy unburdening himself of the bets he had made by the process known to all followers of racing as "hedging." In the end not a penny of his money supported Dark Cherry.

"Just as well," he told himself, "that Craig's gone mad like this. I reckon I can win the race now."

Public opinion certainly was endorsing Navarin's view. Featherspray was favourite at five to one, then came Navarin's horse, Black Crusoe, at sixes. .

As the horses left the paddock Navarin bowed with exaggerated courtesy to Mollie.

"I suppose you think you're going to win!" he inquired cheerfully.

Mollie did not answer.

"Well," he said, "I hope you'll grace the dinner-party that celebrates the winner. Black Crusoe will win—and so will George Navarin. You'll see." He turned on his heel.

Mollie did not even see him go. Every fibre of her being was absorbed in her concentrated gaze after the receding figure of Jack Edison, in the mauve and grey Craig colours, astride in the saddle.

At the post the delay seemed interminable. It seemed that the horses would never be properly lined up for the start. Thirty-four highly sensitive thoroughbreds—no easy matter to get them all to face the same way in one smooth line.

At last! They were off. Two and a quarter miles to go. Mollie clung to her father's arm as the horses

thundered past on the green turf. Yes! Dark Cherry was there racing smoothly behind a bunch of the leading division.

Only four minutes and a few seconds of time, but a fortune at stake! Small wonder that Mollie was breathless. Through her powerful glasses she could see that Featherspray was now leading, another horse second, Black Crusoe close up third and Dark Cherry fourth. Still a mile to go.

"This is where the weight tells," said Craig, his voice curiously hard. It was the only comment he made.

Gradually, yard by yard, Dark Cherry gained on the leaders. The second horse had dropped back, and Black Crusoe was now racing alongside Featherspray, with Dark Cherry third. Only a quarter of a mile to go!

The Navarin colours, red and black, white cap, were now in front. Featherspray was weakening. Dark Cherry was three lengths behind, and seemed unable to diminish the gap.

"Black Crusoe wins!" shouted a voice above the steady crescendo of the crowd. The cry was taken up.

"Black Crusoe! He's won it!"

Then, "No, he hasn't—Dark Cherry will beat him!"

To Mollie's agonised eyes it seemed that the gap between the two horses would never be closed in time. The winning-post was less than one hundred yards away. And Jack Edison, riding for his life, was slowly overtaking the leader.

"Oh, Jack," breathed Mollie, "win—win for my sake!"

The jockey in black and red was using his whip. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen Jack Edison's strained face, ranging alongside. As if locked together the two

horses raced the final spurt. Then—and to Mollie the most wonderful sight in the world—the mauve and grey moved almost imperceptibly forward. The horses flashed by the post. Dark Cherry had won!

A roar went up from the crowd. For a moment there was pandemonium. "A stone overweight and won by a short head!" It appealed to the sporting instincts of the crowd.

Pat Craig was immediately surrounded by an eager crowd. On its outskirts he could see Navarin, a ghastly smile on his face.

"Where's Mollie?" was the first thing Pat asked.

They found her—after the horses had "weighed in"—with one arm round Jack Edison's neck, the other through Dark Cherry's bridle.

### *Notes on "The Last Chance"*

I was spending a week-end in the country with some friends and someone began to talk about the extraordinary popularity of Nat Gould. I well remember the lively discussion that followed. We eventually came to the conclusion that the fundamental reason for his phenomenal success was not so much the widespread interest in racing as the fact that no one seriously rivalled Nat Gould in the production of realistic, thrilling stories of the Turf. Since his death there have been one or two excellent racing stories, but no one who has specialised in this type of fiction as Nat Gould did. I think it is probably true that there is a public which will read racing stories and little else in the way of fiction; but it is also true that a writer has to prove himself—as Nat Gould did—before they will buy his books.

There is, literally, a fortune to be made out of racing fiction. If Edgar Wallace had concentrated on racing stories, it would have been his, I think; but his versatile pen was not to be chained to one subject. One or two other novelists have experimented with

racing ; but the reputation and the profits are only to be made by specialising, and by a prolific output.

Two qualities are essential, the gift of story-telling and absolute accuracy in racing detail. Literary flourishes are not required. Provided the writer can tell an exciting story, full of incident and suspense interest, and provided his knowledge of Turf procedure is infallible, he is the potential successor to Nat Gould.

It is extraordinary that the field has not so far attracted any serious prospectors. Since among followers of racing there appears to be no one willing or able to produce Nat Gould-ish fiction, an opportunity seems indicated for an enterprising storyteller to learn the ropes of racing. But he will have to make a thorough job of it.

"The Last Chance" was written to order. Requiring a short story for Cesarewitch week, the editor rang me up. I am not a racing writer, but he did. I remembered afterwards that I had tipped him the winner of some race or other. This probably explains why he regarded me as knowledgeable on the subject. It is not, however, the writer's business to decline commissions if they can be undertaken. It amused me to write "The Last Chance." The story itself is not worth comment ; it is included to draw attention to the fictional possibilities of the subject. Not only will almost any kind of a racing story sell ; but, properly developed and exploited, the subject is a potential gold-mine. Perhaps someone will take the hint.



## THEM QUEER CHAPS \*

TWENTY crisp one-pound notes were passed through the grille of the Imperial Bank one fine July morning into the hand of old Roger Dilke. A young woman at his side, paying in her employer's money and consequently not very intent on her business, watched his retreating figure with open curiosity.

"He's a rum bird," she said. "Fancy anyone trusting him with that money."

The clerk behind the counter paused in his shovelling. It was a sunny morning and the girl's eyes held a friendly smile.

"Can't go by appearances nowadays," he said. "He may not look it, but that old gentleman is worth a great deal of money. He's a bit queer, too. Why"—his voice trailed off as he caught the manager's eye. It didn't matter, as the girl had forgotten all about the old gentleman in contemplation of the clerk's attractive profile. Romance lurks even in banks.

Meanwhile Roger Dilke had passed out of the bank, not without some difficulty—for the door was heavy and stiff—into the sunlit street. For an old man his step was

\* Published in *Hutchinson's Magazine*.

brisk and his eyes bright as he made his way towards the omnibus stop. He did not seem to need the ash stick he held in his right hand. His left hand curled oddly behind his shabby jacket. A dilapidated hat of nondescript shape might once have been felt, but now it was grimy with age. His clothes, too, were shapeless and ancient. His boots were pitiable. They were battered and worn out. The leather of the uppers had split in several places. Patches of dirty green were plainly visible. A tramp would have despised them.

Many passers-by looked curiously at the old man as he shuffled along the pavement. Others looked away, as if instinctively fearing the importunities of a beggar. Roger Dilke ignored these people. His work did not lie with them. He kept his eyes fixed on the ground in front of him, occasionally putting his hand into his pocket to satisfy himself that his money was safe. He knew that he was not likely to be robbed, but he liked the feel of the folded notes inside his buttoned coat. They were going to do good work.

Now that he was almost at the bus stop, and seeing that there was no bus in sight, he slackened his pace and gave himself up to reflection. A powerful thing, money. A curse or a blessing, according to how you use it. Strange ideas these socialist people have that wealth should be evenly distributed. What was the good of that? It was no use giving money to those who weren't deserving of it. And how could any Government decide who was deserving? That was just it. But he, Roger Dilke, knew, because he saw for himself.

He rattled the kerb impatiently with the ferruleless end of his stick. An overdressed woman holding a

languid child by the hand moved away abruptly under the impression he was blind.

Then the omnibus loomed up and was steered skilfully alongside.

Roger Dilke clambered inside, followed at a respectful distance by the woman and child. The seats filled up rapidly, the bell rang, and the bus moved off. The woman stared frigidly at Roger Dilke's unprepossessing hat. The child by her side surveyed him with mild interest; she did not often have the opportunity of inspecting objects like Roger Dilke at close range. Three young girls, who evidently vied with each other in the display of inferior imitation jewellery, noticed the old man's boots and nudged one another, to the accompaniment of giggles.

Of all this Roger Dilke was completely unconscious. His work had not yet begun. He was not interested in these people. They were undeserving.

Even had he known, it would not have disturbed him that people should sneer at his clothes. Clothes were vanity and there are more important things in the world to attend to, he would have said.

He never thought of replacing his boots. Why should he? New boots wouldn't fit him—they never did. Even these old friends he had had to slit with a knife from time to time to make walking easier. And the only cobbler he had asked to mend them had tossed them contemptuously back across the counter.

The conductor came round collecting the fares. Roger Dilke fumbled in his pocket and found a sixpence, which was the cost of his ticket. The bus was going to the East End of London. This was his

destination. Presently it stopped and several passengers got out, including the three giggling girls. Soon after the over-dressed woman left the bus, pulling the child to one side to avoid contact with the shabby old man.

Other passengers entered the bus from time to time : women with shawls and men without collars. Roger Dilke began to scrutinise his fellow-passengers with more interest. These were perhaps the deserving.

A woman dressed dingily in black sat down wearily beside him. She carried a cheap rush basket from the top of which protruded something wrapped in newspaper. She moved to put the basket on the floor of the bus. Roger Dilke put out his hand.

"It's all right here," he said, indicating the seat. "Plenty of room."

The woman turned her pale face towards him and smiled faintly.

"Thank you, gran'pa."

The bus swayed on, gathering passengers at each stop. Soon it was full again. Opposite, where the woman and child had been, sat a burly man with a coarse red face and a horse-shoe pin in the kerchief wound round his thick neck. He had not been there for more than a minute when he leaned across the bus and addressed himself to Roger Dilke.

"That your parcel?" he demanded aggressively.

The old man looked at him with troubled eyes.

"No," he said.

"Whose is it, then?" pursued the other, getting visibly redder in the face.

The woman in black shrank back into her seat. No

one spoke for a few seconds. The red-faced man addressed himself to the bus generally.

"It's a disgrace, that's what it is. Bringing stinking fish into a pub-public ve'icle. Oughtn't t'be allowed. I've a good mind to throw it aht in the road."

"Shut up," said a voice from the end of the bus. "Leave the lidy alone."

"Wot?" said the red-faced man, rising angrily from his seat. "Who said that? If anyone wants a fight . . ."

His words were lost in the sudden movement of passengers towards the exit. The bus pulled up. The red-faced man sat down, muttering. Roger Dilke rose unsteadily to his feet. The woman in black, clutching the offending bag, also got out. Roger Dilke peered at her and saw that she was crying.

"Don't cry," he said.

"Can't help it, gran'pa. Everything's goin' wrong. Oh, dear, what's the good of living? It ain't worth it."

She turned away but the old man intercepted her eagerly.

"Yes, it is. Perhaps I can prove it to you. Will you come and have a cup of coffee with an old man?"

The woman stared at him. She was thinking of the nasty old men of whom she had read in Sunday newspapers. But this one seemed innocent enough.

"All right," she said. "Thank you."

They went to a little shop with a steamy front window on which were announced dishes and prices, written up in white chalk. They sat on a bench, facing each other across a deal table. The shop's interior was creditably clean.

They were served by a little man in shirt sleeves who whistled.

Roger Dilke allowed her to drink some of the hot, bitter coffee before he said : " Tell me what your troubles are."

His blue eyes were still bright in spite of his age and they held a light of curious elation. The woman hesitated.

" I don't like talking about it," she said. " It don't seem to do much good. Besides, you're a stranger."

" You can confide in me," said Roger Dilke softly.

She drank another mouthful of the coffee.

" I was all right till last year," she said. " Then my husband left me. I got a job for a bit. Hard work to keep four kids nowadays. But I'm not strong and I lost the job. I've tried to get another." She shrugged her shoulders. " I'm still trying. I get a few days' work now and again, so I oughtn't to grumble. But I'd like to keep the kids decent."

Roger Dilke ordered more coffee. The woman talked more freely. He asked questions. An observer would have detected the note of eagerness in his voice.

Presently he leaned across the table. " Perhaps I can get you a job," he said.

The woman looked up.

" D'ye mean it, gran'pa ? "

With shaking fingers he felt in his pocket, took out a card and scribbled on it.

" Here you are," he said, " and take this. Buy a few clothes for the children. I expect they need them."

The woman stared, unbelievably.

" Two pounds ? For me ? Oh, gran'pa, you're not

being funny, are you?" She made queer inarticulate noises in her throat.

Roger Dilke stood up and turned his eyes towards the cracked ceiling.

"You are deserving," he said.

He spoke loudly and the man in shirt sleeves, looking curiously in his direction, stopped whistling and muttered to himself.

Tapping his ash stick in front of him, Roger Dilke led the way out into the street. Without a word to the woman who followed, crying softly, he shambled off.

In the dingy streets he passed unnoticed. It was now very hot and the pavement hurt his feet. He began to lean on his stick as he walked. He turned into a street which revealed its miseries in the full glare of the sun. The monotonous row of small dwellings was uniformly unlovely. Little girls sat on doorsteps with listless babies on their knees. A few ragged urchins were idly kicking a tin can along the gutter. Flies clustered everywhere.

Roger Dilke pulled his shabby hat over his eyes and trudged down the littered pavement. At the end of the alley he paused irresolute. The sun's rays caught him full in the eyes as he looked up to read the name of the street. He did not hear the sound of the approaching Ford. It turned the corner like an irritated wasp and, before the driver could sound the horn or apply his brakes, Roger Dilke was prostrate in the road.

For a few seconds he lay there. As if by magic the sleepy alley was converted into a buzzing hive of excitement. Then women and children of all ages poured from the open doors, windows were thrown open as news of

the accident rapidly spread. A crowd surged round the agitated, perspiring driver.

Roger Dilke slowly raised himself, amid excited murmurs. A man with a thick moustache detached himself from the crowd and helped him gently to his feet.

"I'm not hurt," said Roger Dilke, blinking uncertainly at the anxious driver.

The disappointed crowd melted away. In a few moments only the man who had lifted him up and a few insatiably curious children remained.

"You come along o' me," said the man with the thick moustache. "My missus'll make you a cup o' tea. You'll soon be all right agen. 'Ere, run away an' play."

The inquisitive children grudgingly obeyed.

A few minutes afterwards Roger Dilke was seated in the best wicker chair of a tolerably cool little room, gratefully drinking tea and talking to his rescuer.

It did not take him long to discover why the man with the moustache was at home. He was out of work. Times were bad. What do you expect after a war? There was bitterness in the man's talk. He had served in the Boer War and he was out of work after that. And now after the Great War he was out of work again. He was getting used to it. . . .

"You must let me pay for this cup of tea," said Roger Dilke after a pause.

The other did not answer. He was staring at something unseen in front of him. Roger Dilke got up quietly and put the empty cup on the mantelpiece. He stealthily drew something from his pocket and, folding it up, put that beside it, too. Then he murmured his thanks and went.



In the hot street he quickened his pace. Another of the deserving! Refreshed mentally by the thought of his good work, physically by the rest he had had and the cooling tea, he hurried along. There was still much to be done.

He had been walking through the dusty streets for half an hour when he noticed a young man outside the door of a public-house. The youth—he could not have been more than twenty—hesitated, strode past the door, hesitated again, came back to the door, then thrust his hands firmly into his trousers pockets and crossed the road.

Roger Dilke watched him with intense interest. Obeying an impulse, he hurried after the disappearing young man and with some difficulty overtook him.

"I want to talk to you," he said breathlessly when at last the youth turned round.

"Me?" said the boy suspiciously. "What d'you want me for?"

"I couldn't help noticing you just now," explained the old man. "I think I know what was passing in your mind."

"Oh, do you? Well, it's none of your business," replied the other disagreeably.

"Listen," said Roger Dilke, clutching at his coat. "I may be able to help you."

The young man turned doubtfully.

"How?" he said.

"That depends on you. You're—you're in trouble, aren't you?"

"What of it?" said the young man defiantly.

"If you're in trouble, perhaps I can help you."

"You can't help me," said the young man finally.

"Will money help you?" asked Roger Dilke.

"Money?" echoed the other. "It's because I ain't got any that I'm up against it now. You see . . ."

He plunged suddenly into his story. A girl. Her girl friend with the well-off young man. Discontent with the meagreness of his earnings. Quarrels. How he had tried to make money quickly. Cards, racing—and the girl didn't want him any more. Might as well get drunk and forget it all. . . ."

"No," said Roger Dilke, "that is weakness, not strength. I will help you to be strong."

He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a one-pound note.

"Take this," he said. "It will help you to turn over a new leaf. All will come right in the end."

The young man seized the note.

"You're a sport, guv'nor," he cried. "This'll make all the difference to me." He stopped to thrust the note in his waistcoat pocket. In a calmer voice he went on: "I've been a fool, guv'nor. I've had many a chance of making a bit. But I've always gone chasing my own fancies and lost what I've ever had. This"—he tapped his waistcoat pocket—"is going to do the trick." He paused impressively. "I've got a snip for the three-thirty. And I'm going to shove the whole blooming lot on to win. It's a cert, guv'nor."

Roger Dilke stared at him.

"Here, guv'nor, I'll tell you what I'll do. D'you back horses?"

"I do not," said the old man, "and if I were you . . ."

The young man interrupted him, gaily.

"Now don't go and spoil it all, guv'nor, by preachin' a sermon. I'm going to be all right, I tell you."

He brought his open palm down on Roger Dilke's shoulder and, with a loud laugh, strode off down the street.

Roger Dilke looked after him in dismay. His instinct had failed him. He had made a mistake. He would have to be careful in future. Yet, somehow, the young man had seemed deserving. He shook his head sorrowfully.

The next few hours brought a sequence of tormenting doubts to the mind of Roger Dilke. Try as he would he could not dismiss the thought of the mistake he had made. It was very disturbing.

He encountered others, all deserving. A mother unable to buy her daughter the medicines she needed; an old man whose fruit barrow had been overturned in the traffic; an errand boy whose parcels had been stolen. And others, all deserving. . . .

And still the thought of the young man haunted him. Squandering his, Roger Dilke's, money. It was shocking, criminal! The old man quivered with indignation. He had never before experienced the sickening feeling that his judgment had been at fault.

The incident clouded the day for him. Not even the thought of the deserving whom he was able to reward could obliterate the thing from his mind. As the day wore on he became more and more harassed and preoccupied.

It was in an absent-minded moment towards the end of the day, when he had given away the last one-pound note, that he happened to lean against a fish stall in a busy street. The sun had gone in and the pavements

were already beginning to be crowded with passers-by. Somebody gave him a shove and his elbow slipped on the glistening board. He lurched sideways and fell, his outstretched arm upsetting several pieces of fish on to the grimy pavement.

The proprietor wasted no time on ceremony. He grabbed the old man by the collar, set him on his feet, bashed the hat over his eyes, and kicked him into the road.

Some of the onlookers laughed. A woman raised her voice in protest.

"Deliberate it was," shouted the proprietor of the stall, rescuing his property from the pavement. "'E chucked it orf. I see 'im with my own eyes."

Roger Dilke picked himself up. He was too tired to protest. He betook himself off wearily, followed by derisive laughter.

He had been shabby when he set out, now he was a scarecrow. His clothes were torn and covered with filth; his hat was shapeless. No one would have guessed that this fragment of derelict humanity was a benefactor of the deserving.

He made his way slowly towards the place where he would take the bus homeward. He was very tired. He had never had a more exhausting day. He was troubled, too, by the recurring thought of the one unworthy recipient of his benevolence. He trudged on, miserably.

At last he reached the bus stop. He was glad he had only a few minutes to wait before he was able to climb in and sink gratefully on to a seat. The bus lunged forward and settled down to its lumbering journey.

"Fares, please!"

The conductor's voice broke in on his meditation. He fumbled for a coin. Fumbled again, found none. The conductor surveyed him with displeasure.

"Come along, now; fares, please."

Another frantic search. Nothing.

"I haven't any money," he quavered.

The conductor rang the bell once, abruptly.

"Come on off, then. Off you go, or I'll call a policeman."

Miserably the old man struggled to his feet and out on to the pavement. The conductor grinned and rang the bell.

Roger Dilke watched the receding bus with wretched eyes. He searched his pockets again. There was nothing there. He reckoned up desperately. Sixpence fare, two cups, no, four cups of coffee; that was where his calculations had gone wrong.

A cold wind suddenly sent the dust and scraps of paper hurrying along the road. Roger Dilke shivered. He was cold and hungry. Since the morning he had had practically no food. And he was tired, very tired. And he had no money.

He summoned his wits to his rescue. A taxicab! Of course, that was the thing to do. He could pay for it when he got to his own house. A pity to spend money on a taxicab, but it was necessary now. He did not reflect that he had never been inside a taxicab before; he was too tired to think of anything but the necessity for getting home.

It had now begun to rain, in a slight, depressing drizzle. Roger Dilke dragged his limbs slowly along, scanning the

road with feeble eyes for taxicabs that did not come. One or two he saw, but they already had passengers and did not heed his raised stick.

The minutes dragged by, the wind grew colder and the rain more penetrating. To find a taxicab was the thought that now obsessed him. He lost count of time, became almost indifferent to the cold and the wind and the rain. He must find a taxicab.

It was nearly an hour later that he sighted an empty cab slowly approaching. He waved his stick desperately and shouted hoarsely. The cab drew nearer, it was going to pass him by unheeded. No, the miracle had happened. It drew up by the kerb in front of him. He was saved.

With shaking fingers he moved to open the door.

"Wait a bit," said the voice of the driver. "Where might you be wanting to go?"

Roger Dilke stammered the address.

"No, you don't," said the driver, putting out his arm. "Not until you show me my fare."

"I live there—it's my home." The old man's voice rose to a thin scream. "My name is Dilke, Roger Dilke."

"Bilk?" said the driver, "that's just what I should call it. Not in my cab, matey." He thrust a lever forward and the cab moved off.

Roger Dilke's throat tightened suddenly. His head hurt him intolerably; for a few seconds he did not know where he was. He staggered along, unseeingly. The lights of the street began to revolve unsteadily in circles around him. He knew that if he did not get help soon, he would collapse. He must find a policeman, and

explain. Perhaps he would be arrested. Well, anything was better than this.

He felt sick and faint, but contrived to move along somehow. He saw tramlines in front of him. Surely they would lead somewhere? Then he saw the lights of a tramcar and a crowd. Like a bedraggled moth, he groped towards the lights.

He knew what he would do. He would get inside the warm, glittering tram and he would sit down. Then when he could not pay his fare they would call a policeman and he would be safe. Yes, that is what he would do.

He summoned the remaining shreds of his strength and concentrated on getting to the tram. Nearer and nearer he got, the lights grew brighter, now he could see the people inside. The crowd around him struggled fiercely to get into the tram.

He felt himself pressed from behind and on both sides. Good, it was easier. Only a yard more to go. The brass rail was almost in his grasp. He stretched forward . . .

There was a confused murmur of sound in his ears, a jangling bell, a harsh voice, cries of disappointment. The tram was moving away from him. He was too late.

Somehow he got back to the pavement. Behind him a coffee-stall spread its front invitingly. His glazed eyes wandered past the shining urn, with its steaming contents, the slabs of cake, the ham, the loaf of bread.

Two young women were munching cheerfully in the shelter of the overhanging board. One of their escorts, a tall young man, shouted to him :

“ ‘Ere you are, old ‘un, ‘ave a cup o’ cawtee, do yer good.”

The old man approached timidly. The other young man laughed boisterously.

"Don't be frightened of us. We won't eat you."

"Steady, Bill," said one of the girls. "You've had too much, you know."

"Well, why shouldn't I?" said the young man addressed as Bill. "'Tisn't often I touch lucky, is it? 'Ere, the old 'un's waiting for his cawfee." He laughed unsteadily as the old man raised the mug to his lips with trembling hands.

"Here, old 'un," he went on, "just to show it isn't often as I strike it rich, go and do yourself a bit of good with this."

Brushing aside the restraining hands of the others, he pushed a pound note into Roger Dilke's hand.

"Taxi, sir?" promptly said one of the taxi-drivers standing by the coffee-stall. He had a local reputation as a humorist and his sally raised a laugh.

"Yes, I want a taxi," said Roger Dilke.

When the cab had driven off and the laughter had died down, the boisterous young man said, thoughtfully:

"Blimey if he ain't something like the old gent that give me the quid to-day."

"You're seeing things, Bill," jeered one of the girls.

"Fancy chucking away a quid like that."

"Funny old cove, anyway," said the other. "Looked a bit queer to me."

"It *was* like him," insisted Bill soberly. "I hope he'll be all right."

"Oh, he'll be all right," said the girl, taking Bill's arm. "There's a special providence looks after them queer chaps."



*Notes on "Them Queer Chaps"*

In a chapter on "Plot" in an earlier book of mine\* I wrote :

"The most fruitful source of inspiration is probably the newspaper. . . . Newspaper paragraphs often contain the germ of an idea."

This story anticipated a newspaper report in rather a curious fashion. I discussed the outline of "Them Queer Chaps" with a friend (I always believe in trying out one's plots on one's friends if one can persuade them to listen). He thought it was a good idea (or so he said) and I decided to write the story.

Three days later he sent me the following cutting from the *Westminster Gazette* :

SAMARITAN OF THE SLUMS  
CROWDS WAIT IN VAIN FOR HIS RETURN  
MONEY GIFTS LEAD TO QUARRELS

All yesterday until late at night another crowd besieged Buxton Street, Whitechapel, E., the centre of operations of the mysterious donor of £10 and £1 notes, described in the later editions of yesterday's *Westminster Gazette*.

A rumour that the aged, unknown benefactor might again visit the street attracted so many people from the surrounding district that special police had to be posted there from the Commercial Street station.

The man did not come, but still the crowd waited.

The circumstances resulting from these strange gifts have all the irony of a Tolstoy parable or Tchekhov story.

A charitable man decides to give away money in person to poor people in an East End back street. He dispenses a few hundred pounds in a quiet way for five or six weeks. Families in straitened circumstances are relieved of want . . .

The mystery man is as great an enigma as ever.

"Them Queer Chaps" is more of a character study than a story, and the average magazine editor's dislike for character studies is well known. Perhaps because it was so easily written, I like it. It is *picaresque* in form, without any complication of narrative ; in fact, it has only a slender thread of plot. It is the kind of story more tempting to write than easy to sell. From a

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\* *Short Story Writing for Profit.*

practical point of view, therefore, character studies should be regarded doubtfully. Not many magazines view them with favour and, more likely than not, one's efforts in this direction will join the dusty pile of unpublished manuscript.

However, the idea of a shabby eccentric old man distributing largesse, and finally being unwittingly rescued by the one undeserving recipient of his favours, appealed to me. Although it was written readily enough certain points in the story demanded careful attention. In the first place, it was necessary to establish the queerness of the old man. His shabby appearance was easily described; but it was also necessary to indicate his wealth. Hence the opening of the story in the bank, and the fragment of dialogue between the girl and the clerk.

The repetition of the references to Roger Dilke's "work" and the "deserving" provide a foundation for the old man's distress later in the story when the young man tells him what he is going to do with the pound note. The incidents which precede his encounter with the young man seemed necessary, partly to give the story "body" and also to account for the money he started out with. Moreover—this is important—the reader must be left with the impression that the old man has had an exhausting day. The fish stall episode was also brought in to make the old man unrecognisable to the "undeserving" young man when they meet at the coffee-stall.

One reader, whose opinion I respect, suggested that the story ends too abruptly, but I think it would have been a mistake to carry it any further. I may be wrong.

It was rejected by several magazines, and I was not surprised. In fact, it was a surprise when it was accepted. It is, incidentally, one of my grievances against the magazines that they cold-shoulder the character study. I believe there is a wider and more appreciative public for them than editors imagine. A bigger proportion of character sketches, and not so many artificial "plot stories" would, I submit, raise the standard of magazine fiction.

Literature is not incompatible with popularity. One of the greatest, to my mind, of this generation of short-story writers, Stacy Aumonier, has shown what can be done with the character study. It was plainly one of his favourite forms. Yet he was one of the most popular magazine contributors.

There will always be a preference, I fear, for the "action" story, as opposed to the character study. The fundamental demand is for *a story*. We can only hope that editors will presently show more appreciation of character fiction. Meanwhile would-be magazine contributors must make due allowances for existing editorial prejudice.

## TO LET \*

SEP WARRENDER tightened the cord of his expensive dressing-gown, surveyed with disfavour in the mirror the scarcely perceptible stubble on his chin, and began the day, as was his invariable custom, by brushing his hair. To this operation he usually imparted a great deal of unnecessary energy, but on this particular morning his strokes lacked vigour. In fact, he abandoned what was only a half-hearted attempt and stared gloomily out of the window.

Now the view from the bedroom windows of Sep Warrender's new and expensive London flat was something of which he was warrantably proud. The wide green expanse of Hyde Park greeted and refreshed the eye. The traffic in Piccadilly rumbled distantly yet not loudly enough to disturb the cheerful chirruping of the irrepressible London birds below.

But Sep turned from the window with a sour look on his face. It is a pity he is introduced to your notice looking disagreeable, for otherwise you would almost certainly have taken to him at once. He really is quite a presentable-looking young man ; with a tanned skin and clear blue eyes that seem out of place in the streets of a

city, and a rare friendly smile, mostly reserved for horses, of which, alas, there did not seem to him to be a great number left in London.

But it was not on account of horses that Sep was scowling. The trouble was much more personal. Sep was lonely. Thoroughly and completely lonely. Old-timers out in Africa had told him how lonely a chap could be in a crowded city, but Sep hadn't believed a word of it. And here he was, all fashionably dressed up (or he soon would be, he thought, with a rueful glance towards his clothes), in the best flat London could provide, with a bank balance substantial enough to console anyone but Sep, and all the sunny days before him—and nothing to do with himself, or, what was more to the point, no one to do anything with.

For three weeks Sep had talked to nobody but servants and tradespeople and waiters and an occasional bus conductor. As a conversational programme it hadn't been exactly exhilarating. Not that Sep was talkative by nature. It was just the disappointment of the thing, having no one to exchange confidences with, to share the good time he had always promised himself. He was alone in London and thoroughly depressed, and no one cared a hoot about it.

Sep stared mournfully out of the window again. It really was too bad. For the first time he thought wistfully of the cheerful conviviality of the Rand Club, and wished himself back in Africa. He recalled with an attempt at a grin his unsuppressed glee when his uncle's will had so astonishingly made him rich. How he had looked forward to London—his "home," as he had always sentimentally thought of it. A fine home-coming!

"I'll sell this flat," said Sep aloud and abruptly, "and clear out."

He said it with an effort, for he was really rather proud of Lancaster Mansions. But having said it, he would jolly well stick to it. Thus he made up his mind as he seized shaving soap and brush, turned on the hot water and began to lather determinedly.

"No place for a man," he muttered as he shaved. "Too small. And too darned comfortable. Get soft. Want room to breathe. Open air. Um."

Sep grinned at his soapy reflection in the glass. He knew he was a liar. The legend of the splendid he-man and the wild open spaces was all very well for fiction. Sep knew why the old-timers scorned the fleshpots of civilisation. They couldn't afford 'em. He hadn't been able to until old Uncle Potter died so providentially.

Sep chuckled with retrospective satisfaction at the thought of the one enterprising individual who had tried to cultivate his acquaintance and "show him round." This suspiciously well-dressed stranger had invited Sep to share a cocktail or two and a dinner at the Berkeley and a box at the Empire, all in one breath, so to speak. Sep was young but not too young to have heard of the confidence trick. So he declined the invitation for that night and joyously asked the friendly stranger whether he wouldn't ring him up another time. Sep hoped he did because the number he gave him was not his own, but one he happened to have made a note of; and something like the following telephonic dialogue must have taken place (or so Sep hoped):

"Is Mr. Warrender there?"

"Mr. Warrender? Don't know him. This is Bow Street Police Station."

Sep sponged his glistening face and laughed again. He was beginning to feel a little better. By the time he had had his bath and dressed he felt a great deal better. As I have said, Sep was young. Over his lonely but plentiful breakfast he weighed the problem of disposing of his flat. *The Times* lay unopened by his plate. His gaze wandered abstractedly towards it and a largish piece of crisp bacon made an abrupt disappearance into his mouth.

As he was by himself and speaking to himself, the fact that he spoke with his mouth full was of no consequence.

"Let it to someone," he jerked forth with the triumph of an Archimedes, a Newton, and a Watt all rolled into one. "Of course. Advertise it. Meet people that way. Jolly good idea."

He began to choke, partly no doubt from excitement at his inspiration, but chiefly owing to the bacon, and seized simultaneously *The Times* and a large cup of hot coffee. Both played their part in restoring him to equanimity. He ran his eye appreciatively down the list of flats and maisonnettes to let. He would add number 3D, Lancaster Mansions to that list just as quickly as could be managed.

As he made his way downstairs, scorning and incidentally overtaking the descending lift, he pictured the whole of *The Times* office staff hustling around, waving his cheque, telephoning orders to the printers to ensure that his advertisement appeared without fail in the following morning's issue. He did not know *The*

*Times*. No sooner had he stepped into the office, than his impatience subsided and a calm and dignified air took its place. Sep knew how susceptible he was, and the humour of the thing appealed to him.

At the counter he concentrated on the wording of his advertisement. A musical voice at his elbow quite suddenly interrupted his attempt at graphic description of the charms of Lancaster Mansions. His pencil poised gracefully in the air, Sep turned round, to find himself looking at the prettiest girl he had ever seen. She was so astoundingly, surprisingly, amazingly, incredibly beautiful (I recall to the best of my ability a few of Sep's subsequent adjectives) that he could only stare blankly at her. In another instant Sep had groaned inwardly, and turned back to his labours; for the musical voice was plainly on tap for the benefit of a dark, beetle-browed young man behind her. In the same instant, Sep's keen eye registered the odiously proprietorial air of the said young man. He caught a glimpse of a slim ungloved hand and the discreet flash of a single diamond set in a ring of platinum promptly confirmed his immediate misgiving.

Sep's heart sank. In that moment he felt more desolately lonely than ever before. His pencil streaked gloomily across the paper. He was having an unfortunate morning. Probably everything was destined to go wrong. This cheerless thought struck him as he handed over the draft of his advertisement. He scarcely heeded the economically-minded clerk's diplomatic suggestions for the improvement of his own literary effort. He paid mechanically and made for the door.

As he turned down Queen Victoria Street, Sep began to feel distinctly uneasy. The more he thought of leaving



Lancaster Mansions, the less he liked the prospect. The flat wasn't his home, but it was the nearest thing to it he had. Of course he wasn't quitting, he assured himself angrily when his recollection whispered that only an hour or so previously he had contemplated going back to Africa. He had made up his mind to stay in London, and stay he would. But move somewhere else? Unthinkable!

"Brrr," said Sep. "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know."

The rest of the day he debated with himself the solution of the problem which the publication of his advertisement would soon create. Of course he could cancel it—but, and Sep grinned at the thought, surely no one had ever faced the uplifted eyebrows of *The Times* by wanting to cancel an advertisement, and he wasn't going to be the first. No, he would let it go in, and see what turned up. The one thing clearly decided in his mind was his now firm resolve not to let the flat under any circumstances.

The advertisement duly appeared the following morning. Sep ate his breakfast leisurely and awaited developments with interest. He was looking forward to a nice sociable day.

He hadn't long to wait. The ball started rolling with the arrival of an old gentleman with an equally old overcoat which by some miracle had not yet permanently parted company with its one-time astrakhan collar. Wisps of faded hair sprouted forth in two small patches, one above each ear. Sep found himself holding an ancient top-hat. He stared at the apparition in astonishment.

"Is Mr. Warrender at home?" said the apparition in a mournful voice.

"I'm—my name is Warrender," gulped Sep.

"Ah, pardon me, pardon me," said the old gentleman, snatching his hat out of Sep's hands, and stepping hastily inside. "Now, this flat of yours, um, er, um."

"Yes," said Sep gloomily. "Come in here, will you?"

He led the way into the sitting-room, and waited patiently while the other embarked on a prolonged search in all the pockets of his voluminous coat for what eventually proved to be a pair of spectacles. These he adjusted with some difficulty on his nose and turned to Sep with a wintry smile.

"Not this flat of yours, um, er, um. I have—I have the honour to represent, um, er," launching another voyage of discovery inside his overcoat and producing a booklet with a printed card attached to it by a small metal clip, "to represent, um, er, um, the firm of Messrs. Gwyer and Gwyer, established in the West End as house and estate agents——"

"Sorry," said Sep, "but you see I don't really want to let this flat."

"Um, er, um" The spectacles were not proof against shocks and slid convulsively down the ancient astrakhan collar. The honoured representative of Messrs. Gwyer and Gwyer rescued them hastily and stared hard at Sep.

"I mean it," said Sep, opening the door. "Here's your hat. Good day."

"Um, er, um. Um, er, um."

"That's all right," said Sep pleasantly. "The lift's on your right."

As Sep spoke the lift shot into view. The twin gates opened and an old lady emerged. For an old lady she

was incredibly athletic. She gave Sep the impression of bounding down the carpeted corridor like a bonneted veldt antelope. He watched her approach, admiring the skilful swerve by which she avoided the faltering representative of Messrs. Gwyer and Gwyer.

"Mr. Warrender?" she demanded shrilly.

"Come in," said Sep weakly. It was no good saying anything else, he felt.

"I don't like lifts," she announced sharply.

"There is a staircase," said Sep mildly.

"It is the case," the old lady retorted. "They always give me a headache. Show me over this flat, young man, if you please."

"I'm afraid I don't want to let it after all," said Sep.

"I can see it is. And not much of a hall, either," she sniffed.

It took Sep over a quarter of an hour to explain. At least twenty times the old lady begged him not to shout, as she wasn't really deaf. Finally, by means of eloquent dumb-show, he convinced her.

As soon as the door had closed behind her Sep helped himself to a long, strong drink. He felt he deserved it. He dismissed with an effort a cowardly impulse to go out and leave callers to ring the bell in vain. Besides, other people as well as deaf old ladies and house agents' venerable representatives might put in an appearance.

Sep had another drink and assured himself the worst was over. But the worst was to come.

It came in the person of a lieutenant-colonel of the Indian Army. There were two things about him that Sep did not know; not that it would have made any difference either way. The first was that the gallant

colonel was spending, much against his will, a day in London, choosing (at least that was his original way of putting it to himself) a flat suitable for his sister on her way home from India ; and the second was that the gallant colonel was retired.

Perhaps if Sep had known this much he would at any rate have realised what he was in for. As it was, he soon discovered the argumentative abilities of retired senior officers.

"Afraid this flat isn't to let," began Sep blandly.

The colonel scowled at *The Times* in his hand. His moustache began to agitate itself.

"Isn't this number 3D ? Am I in the wrong flat ?"

"Yes—no," said Sep, logically enough.

"Grrr," said the colonel. "Show me round."

Sep was gazing fascinated at the colonel's twitching moustache. He had never seen anything like it before. It hypnotised him. Weakly, he led the way.

With the activity of a Vickers machine-gun, the colonel began to shoot questions at him. "Must take a firm grip of myself," Sep was muttering. "Get rid of him, quick." He made a noble effort.

"Afraid there's a mistake," he began. "I don't want to let this flat after all."

Sep observed with alarm the colonel's condition. His face and neck turned from brick-red to an artistic shade of royal purple. His hands clenched, eyebrows lowered, moustache almost revolving on its own axis, he took several steps backward. His movements, even at that moment, reminded Sep irresistibly of a buffalo preparing for action.

Then the barrage began.

"How—how *dare* you, sir!" thundered the colonel.

Unfortunately Sep was completely in the dark. Had he been listening to the colonel's questions he would have known that the last was an inquiry as to the suitability of number 3D, Lancaster Mansions for an unattached maiden lady. As it was, the colonel's interpretation of his reply never dawned on him. In fact, it remains a mystery to this day.

Facing the infuriated officer, it came to Sep as if in a flood of great light that there was no need any longer to be bored. A cheerful grin spread over his face.

This was the signal for battle. With a snorting roar the colonel charged. Sep was quick on his feet, and was playing on his own ground, so to speak; and he side-stepped the enraged colonel without difficulty. But the other was full of determination. His moustache was galvanised into incredible activity and he rushed again. Sep skilfully thrust a solidly-built armchair into his knees, and the colonel staggered, bellowing fiercely. Sep decided it was the moment for counter-attack. This time he shot out his foot and the moustache swiftly buried itself in a rug a trifle over five feet away. Sep seized the opportunity and the rug. In a twinkling the colonel was neatly enveloped and Sep was astride. The colonel gave a strenuous and not unsuccessful imitation of a bucking horse, but under the pressure of Sep's knees he gradually subsided.

"Well, you've gone down with your whiskers flying," said Sep, with a pacific grin.

"You—you—you wait till—till I get up," the colonel jerked forth in a smothered voice. "I'll teach you to insult my sister——"

"Your sister?" In his surprise Sep relaxed his grip, and the colonel shot convulsively out of the rug and staggered to his feet. "Do you mean to say you've been talking about your *sister*?"

For a few seconds they stood facing each other. Then a queer look came into the colonel's eye. There could be only one explanation. This young man must be mad. He backed towards the door.

Sep felt that the moment had come to make peace.

"I'd like to meet your sister," he said encouragingly.

The colonel's moustache behaved like a Euclid nightmare. He made hoarse, unrecognisable noises, made a spasmodic grab for his hat, and fled.

Sep mopped his forehead. He was feeling a little hot and bothered. What on earth had bitten that chap?

He gave it up. "Mad as a hatter," he decided.

Had Sep known it, those were the very words used at that very moment by his late opponent as he hurried out into the street.

The encounter produced one thing, at any rate; Sep made up his mind. No more callers for him. His eye alighted on some notepaper. The very thing! He would stick a notice on the door: "Flat NOT to be let—Arrangements Made."

He lost no time in putting his decision into action. It was the work of but a few seconds. He had just neatly pinned the announcement on the outside of the door, admiring its general effect with his head slightly on one side, when footsteps sounded behind him. Sep began to retreat, when a voice hailed him.

Involuntarily he turned round. Facing him was the

dark beetle-browed young man with whom he had seen the morning before the astoundingly, surprisingly, amazingly, incredibly beautiful girl in *The Times* office.

What happened next does Sep credit. He shoved his back firmly against the door. He had a good square back, and the sheet of notepaper did the vanishing trick.

"Come in," said Sep, pushing open the door with a skilful backward movement.

The beetle-browed young man stared, but followed.

"Have a drink?" said Sep impulsively.

Now there was nothing specially prepossessing about that young man that he should find such sudden favour in the eyes of Septimus Warrender. Nor was Sep's gesture a reversion to the familiar habits of colonial hospitality. It must have been, as he afterwards explained it to himself, nothing more nor less than instinct.

A ray of hope illuminated Sep's mental horizon. It was something he could not have defined to himself. A mysterious prompting that told him that here was a chance of seeing that astoundingly (etc.) beautiful girl again. Quite suddenly he had a fierce and unreasonable desire to see her again, even if it were only to see her for five minutes.

Sep hadn't exactly taken that young man to his heart when he first saw him, and now he began to dislike him in earnest. He discovered he was an author, that women liked his books (at least, so he said), that he was having unaccountable difficulty in finding a suitable flat, that he liked Sep's whisky (Sep took the hint a trifle ungraciously), and that he always typed his own manuscripts. He began to tell Sep the plot of the novel on which he was engaged.

Sep listened with masterly inattention. He wondered how soon the subject of *The Times* advertisement would crop up, so that he could put his spoke in, and say, casually, "Oh, by the way, I think I saw you in *The Times* office yesterday morning—with a rather pretty" (rather pretty—oh, Sep!) "girl." Yes, that would probably be as good an opening as any. Unless he went on to say, mendaciously, "I believe I've met her before somewhere." Well, he could add that if the first bit didn't work.

Sep woke up to the fact that he was being asked a question. Subconsciously he caught the tail-end of it.

"What would *you* do in a case like that?" the beetle-browed young man had said.

"Oh, I don't know," said Sep diplomatically.

"Wouldn't *you* want to shoot him?" The author whose books were popular with women became expansively eloquent. "Here's a man who's robbed him of the woman he loves, and on the eve of their wedding. Can you imagine anything more dastardly? Anything more deserving of a bullet in a dirty carcase?"

"A bit thick, certainly," conceded Sep teebly.

The recital went on. Sep hated to inspire him to further heights by refilling his glass, but he needed a drink himself. Luckily there was not much left in the decanter, and Sep had an even luckier inspiration.

"I'm afraid there's no more whisky," he said untruthfully.

The beetle-browed author looked regretfully at his empty glass.

"Well, perhaps I'd better look round the flat," he said. They went from room to room, the popular



author talking volubly all the time. Sep began to think he had lost his opportunity of saying his little piece. Then, after he had inspected the flat thoroughly and discussed everything there was to be discussed, leaving Sep with only time for monosyllabic replies, the literary young man—whose name, it appeared was Benton, Arnold Benton—"not Arnold Bennett," he explained, with a modest smile—suddenly solved the problem.

As he resumed his hat and coat, he said one thing that Sep was longing and at the same time dreading to hear.

"I'll bring my fiancée to see the flat to-morrow. That all right?"

Sep remembered the notice just in time and showed his visitor off the premises with creditable finesse. A few seconds later he tore up the paper meditatively and cursed himself for being a variegated ass. Why hadn't he told that chap the flat wasn't to let after all, or that it was already let? Why go and make a fool of himself simply because he wanted to see a girl who was someone else's fiancée? Why, oh, why?

Conflicting emotions struggled with each other in Sep's breast—if, physiologically speaking, that is the proper arena. One thing alone clearly emerged from his confusion. He jolly well had to see that girl again. And he jolly well *was* going to see her again. With this cheerful and consoling thought clearly resolved, Sep lit a cigarette, walked down the stairs, turned into Piccadilly and made for the Berkeley with an excellent appetite for lunch.

For the rest of the day Sep tasted the exquisite delights and torture of anticipation. You, who have also waited impatiently for the arrival of someone

supremely important, must not sniff disparagingly at his sufferings. For Sep's condition was uncomfortably complicated.

He went to bed a prey to several different brands of anxiety and in the early hours of the morning woke up at the climax of a nightmare in which Mr. Arnold Benton, mounted on a hideous fur-coated fire-belching animal, and followed by armies of his adoring but equally fierce women, was brandishing revolvers at him and clamouring for his blood.

Apart from this diversion he had an excellent night's rest, and, refreshed by his customary sequence of early morning tea, cigarette, shave, cigarette, bath, cigarette, breakfast and pipe, he awaited developments with something akin to equanimity. In the fresh morning light Mr. Arnold Benton seemed decidedly less formidable.

After several false alarms, and when Sep was just making up his mind that she wasn't coming after all, she did. She stood on his threshold, ravishingly beautiful. She spoke. Ye gods! Divine music! Sep heard not a word. He had just grasped the fact that she was alone.

The divinity, not comprehending in the least this nice-looking young man's confusion, repeated her remark in a slightly louder, but ever so musical voice.

"Mr. Benton is sorry he cannot come," she said. "Will you excuse him? He is working. You see, he has had an inspiration."

Sep's sense of humour came to his rescue.

"Has he thought of something more original than shooting?" he said, smiling.

"How nice of you to remember! Arnold tells

everyone his plots, of course. I think it's rather silly of him, don't you ? "

Sep diplomatically changed the subject.

" Won't you come and look round the flat ? " he said.

Her enthusiasm warmed Sep's heart. This beautiful creature was delightfully human. Sep nobly thrust his misgivings into the background. It was enough to bask in the sunshine of her smile and to hear the sweet music of her voice. They got on famously.

In his enjoyment Sep completely overlooked the fact that he was disposing of his tenancy at Lancaster Mansions. Nor, if it had occurred to him, would he have worried about it in the least.

But after a while it did occur to Sep that the enjoyment of something rare and precious safely ensconced, as it were, behind a prohibitive plate-glass window is at best a fugitive pleasure. His heart sank. Here was this superb girl—when she volunteered her name as Miss Bryant, the prosaic surname gave Sep a thrill—well, here was this adorable creature engaged to marry a nasty author who talked interminably. A wave of sorrow for himself swept over poor Sep.

While he was thus meditating, Miss Bryant was busily admiring the flat and its contents.

" I *must* tell you how nice it all is," she said. " You won't put the rent up if I do ? "

" Rather not," said Sep, beaming at her friendly smile. " I'll reduce it."

He wanted to add " if you'd like me to," but discretion forbade. She laughed at his pleasantry and Sep began to wonder if Mrs. and Mr. Arnold Benton would give him a job about the flat.

"Arnold must just have somewhere really quiet to work," she was saying, looking appreciatively out of the window. . . . "I think this will be ideal."

Then Sep said a daring thing. He asked the question lightly.

"Do you think authors ought to marry?"

"Of course," she smiled. "I know Arnold's going to be happy. Everyone says marriage is just what he wants."

Sep did not feel it was the most propitious moment to confess that he at least did not subscribe to the general theory. He groaned inwardly, and retreated into his shell. There was no hope. He looked gloomily at the alabaster-mounted clock on his desk. (Soon it would be Arnold's desk—ugh!) In a few minutes she would be gone. And he would never see her again.

"I must be going," she said, noticing his agitated glance at the clock. "Though I would like to come back after lunch and measure things. Arnold's rather fussy about curtains," she added. "You don't mind?"

For all Sep cared, Arnold could hang the flags of all the nations round the walls. His brain was working furiously. Had he heard aright? Coming back after lunch? He took the bull by the horns.

"If you aren't lunching with anyone," he said, "perhaps you will give me the pleasure——"

"How nice of you," she said. "But—but I'm afraid Arnold wouldn't approve. You see——"

"I know," said Sep heavily.

For a desperate moment he wished he had one of those marvellous books on etiquette which would tell him what to do in a case like this. He had no right to ask her, of

course. And yet . . . she was looking up at him, and smiling, and something in her eyes told him she wanted to come. If only he had the courage to press his invitation !

The moment passed. Sep began to wish the floor would cave open and absorb him suddenly. He looked anywhere but at Miss Bryant.

His embarrassment was not lost on her. Clearly there was some reason why he couldn't press his invitation. She sighed and held out her hand.

" I think perhaps I'd better not come back."

Sep mumbled something intended to be expostulatory, and grasped her hand as the drowning mariner clutches at the proverbial straw. Then she was gone.

Unconsciously he did the conventional thing. He paced up and down so fiercely that it was remarkable no hole was worn in the long-suffering carpet. He called himself every abusive name he could think of—thanks to his training his vocabulary was quite extensive. He rang the changes on nouns and adjectives with fluency and repetition. It was all in vain. Mere words were useless. If only he could *do* something !

He completely forgot about his lunch. Feeling suddenly the need for fresh air he slammed the door of the flat behind him and went out. In such a crisis, it might be thought that food and drink had no claims on a man like Sep, but if the truth be told, after he had completed two strenuous circuits of the park, the thought of food smote Sep with great urgency. He made hastily for the Albert Gate and the grill-room of the Hyde Park Hotel.

The restorative effects of a well-grilled fillet steak,

garnished with crisp fried potatoes, tomatoes and mushrooms, and a spot of Gorgonzola cheese, all washed down with a pint of amber-coloured lager beer, are so well known as not to be particularly remarkable. In Sep's case the prescription was singularly efficacious.

With his second glass of beer Sep had made up his mind. He would write, as man to man, to Mr. Arnold Benton, and tell him what had happened. As man to man—a capital idea!

Half an hour later, in spite of his excellent lunch, Sep was to be seen vigorously gnawing a hotel pen-holder in an effort to put down on paper, in a few simple words, just what had happened. After twenty-five minutes of laborious mental effort the sheet of notepaper in front of Sep read as follows:

*"Dear Benton,*  
*As man to man——"*

With a savage gesture Sep tore the paper in two and hurled it into the rapidly filling waste-paper basket. Three subsequent attempts suffered the same fate. Sep pushed his chair back and made once more for the fresh air.

I will condense the tale of his sufferings.

At six forty-five pip emma, a wild-eyed young man pushed his way into a post office in the Strand, seized a telegraph form, filled it up and handed it across the counter. The clerk, who was a married man with five children, sighed as he attended to the hieroglyphic procedure attaching to the reception of telegrams. It read:

*As man to man I have fallen in love with Miss Bryant. What are we to do about it.—Septimus Warrender.*

Sep took a taxi back to Lancaster Mansions and groaned at every block in the traffic. If on receipt of that telegram Mr. Arnold Benton hip-pocketed his revolver and raced for Sep's flat, Sep felt that at all costs he must be there.

It says much for the efficiency and promptitude of the post office that Sep had not to wait till the following morning for a reply to his telegram. At nine o'clock Sep was staring bewildered at the following :

*Marry her if she'll have you. What's it got to do with me.—Benton.*

Sep put one hand to his head and with the other reached for the decanter.

"What the devil do you mean by sending me imbecile telegrams?" was Mr. Arnold Benton's greeting the following morning. "Does it mean we're not going to have this flat after all?"

Sep looked from the angry author to his smiling fiancée, on whom he had set eyes for the first time in his life precisely two minutes before. He took a deep breath and looked at the other Miss Bryant.

"I certainly have other plans—now," he said.

"Well, of all the——" began Mr. Arnold Benton.

"Arnold, be quiet," said his fiancée. She laid her hand on her sister's arm. "Good-bye, Felicity, dear. We must go. I think we'll take that cottage in Sussex after all."

"But the flat——" Arnold said with only a lingering touch of exasperation——

"May still be in the family," said the fiancée cryptically "Come along."

They went.

"Felicity," breathed Sep. "I thought—that day—I saw you—engagement ring——"

Felicity drew off her gloves. A single-stone diamond sparkled in its platinum setting on the third finger of her right hand.

"All nice people are stupid," she said. "And Arnold ought to have explained I was coming instead of my sister to see the flat." She laughed merrily. "I'm so hungry. Will you take me out to lunch?"

### *Notes on "To Let"*

If I had to point to one story in this book as the most typical magazine product I should choose "To Let." Yet its plot is its weakest point. The observant young writer may derive a useful hint from this.

Give the average editor choice between (a) a story which combines a good plot and an unpleasant theme and (b) a story whose plot is hackneyed and trivial but which is pleasantly and perhaps amusingly told, and it is pretty safe to predict he will go for (b) every time.

In the introductory chapter to this book I emphasised the demand for "happy" stories. Drama is acceptable, but comedy is popular. The light, romantic story, it is worth noting, has found increasing favour in the past few years. Several magazines which specialise in stories of this type are very popular with the holiday-reading public. The demand is significant.

I had hoped that "To Let" would be thought funny. But none of the few people I know who read it seemed to think so. I console myself with the thought that the humorous story is notoriously difficult to write. Personally, I laugh loud and long.



at P. G. Wodehouse's inimitable stories : but I do know people who are bored by them.

As " To Let " obviously depends for its effects on the writing, there is no point of structural interest worth discussion. As for its plot, the less said the better. I took care to make it a modern story, and adapted the treatment to its requirements. I aimed at nothing more than light pastry. If the reader considers it a singularly unpalatable suet pudding, let him reflect on the difficulties that lay in wait for every would-be humorist.

But, curiously enough, editors will often take a chance with humorous fiction : maybe because the supply falls far short of the demand. To the harassed editor, making up his magazine " dummy " every month, the printable humorous story which occasionally comes his way is usually welcome, if only because it helps to give variety to the contents page.

Humour in fiction usually yields big dividends or—none at all. Either you can write a funny story, or you can't. If at first you don't succeed—give it up, for you almost certainly never will. But the experiment is well worth while, for if your humorous efforts find a market, you can be reasonably certain that your future work will sell equally well, if not better. The penalty of acquiring a reputation as a humorist is well known ; you will never be allowed to write anything else. But the compensations are good and solid, and your bank manager will beam upon you, and call you sir.

## THE MELODY OF LOVE \*

I DON'T like music-halls. In my fifty odd years I don't suppose I have been to more than half a dozen. But sentiment gets the better of me sometimes. It did that autumn evening when I stood outside the brilliantly lighted front of the Imperial. I remember I shivered slightly when the wind sent a handful of dead leaves scurrying across the Square. I turned to those defiant electric lights. The last survivors of the music-halls were putting up a brave show. I had a sudden feeling of melancholy. In spite of my indifference to their crude forms of entertainment, I found myself regretting the decline and fall of the music-halls. They were English, at any rate ; more than could be said for those detestable little picture palaces. And their departure was yet another link gone with the old days—the days of Nash's Regent Street and the jingling hansom cabs. The good old days, as we always say.

So I climbed the imposing marble stairs and bought a ticket. The performance had luckily gone half its course when I took my seat. I say luckily, for if I had gone in at the beginning I should never have sat it through. And then I should probably not have lost my spectacles and certainly not have met Feodor Kranik.

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\* Published in *Woman*.

And if I had not met Feodor Kranik this story would never have been written.

As it was, I listened with mild attention to the vigorous efforts of a so-called Australian vocalist who was in action when I threaded my way to my seat. Then there were a couple of comedians, not too bad at all, I remember ; then a woman singing and playing the 'cello at the same time ; then a troupe of clever cyclists whom I watched with difficulty owing to the haze of pipe and cigar smoke. After the cyclists there wasn't anything of interest except a short film of topical events. The audience interested me more than the performers, but as I was sitting in the front row of the stalls it was impossible to watch them. So I found myself observing the men playing in the orchestra a few feet in front of me. They were a commonplace crowd with their dingy dinner jackets and weary expressions. They played with a sort of melancholy efficiency, I thought. Once when the two comedians were exchanging funny remarks, I noticed one of the fiddlers nod his head and make some comment to the pianist next to him. I suppose he was remarking on some new "gag," welcome as a change from the monotony of the same old stuff three times daily.

The man at the piano to whom he spoke immediately attracted my attention. I had not noticed him before. For the moment I could not place him. He was not young and he certainly wasn't English. He was, if anything, shabbier than the rest, and yet he stood out in that plebeian crowd. There was something indefinably patrician in that pale, lined face with its expressive mouth and deep-set dark eyes. His hair, streaked with grey, was still abundant and grew low down at the sides of his

temples. It was the face of a man old before his time. A man who had known suffering and poverty, and, above all, disappointment. Here, I said to myself, is a man whom life has cheated of something. Afterwards I was to know how right was that casual judgment.

It must have been after the topical film—flashing for a few consecutive seconds on the launching of a ship, the start of a cross-country race, prize-winning dogs and similar “news” medley—that I mislaid my spectacles. I had to scramble hastily to my feet for the few jerky bars of the National Anthem. When I had made my way out of the theatre I felt for my cigarette-case and matches and suddenly became aware of the loss of my glasses. I turned back and was just in time to make inquiries from the be-medalled commissionaire. The auditorium was now deserted except for a few energetic cleaners at work. I pointed out my seat, but there was no sign of the spectacles.

“Someone picked ‘em up, sir, I expect,” said the man. “Return ‘em as lost property termorrer. Ain’t as though they’re any use to anyone else.”

There was nothing for it but to accept this encouragement. I was annoyed, of course, for my sight is not what it used to be, and it meant I shouldn’t be able to read my newspaper in my club when I got there. I thanked the commissionaire in the usual way and descended the marble stairway to the street.

Out of the shadows—for the Imperial’s illumination had of course vanished—a man stepped noiselessly up to me.

“Pardon,” he said in a soft, cultured voice. “I have been looking for you, Monsieur. You have been

searching for your glasses, yes? Here they are, Monsieur."

I took them gratefully from his outstretched hand.

"I am not allowed in the front of the house, Monsieur," he explained. "You put them on the top of the barrier which hides us from the audience and they fell on the wrong side."

The light of a street lamp showed me who he was. He was the pianist I had noticed so particularly.

I stood there, hesitating. It was one of those occasions when one doesn't quite know how to repay a service. Obviously, I couldn't offer him a tip. Yet he looked as though a square meal wouldn't do him any harm. And he had gone to the trouble of waiting for me.

All this passed through my mind in a flash; and in the same instant I had an inspiration. I was at a loose end, with no company but my own; and I was suddenly hungry.

"I am much obliged to you," I said. "Will you do me a further service? If you're not otherwise engaged, come and have some supper with me. I can't enjoy my food if I eat it alone, so it would be kind of you to join me."

He looked at me swiftly, hesitating for a fraction of a second.

"The kindness is yours, Monsieur," he said, with a courteous little bow.

We went to the Isola Bella, where we could be sure of good food. I have no time for the ordinary run of Soho restaurants with their suburbanites and pseudo-bohemians, but the Isola Bella is different. We were

welcomed by the elder Micotti and conducted to a table where we could talk.

My companion drank his *apéritif* in silence. He had changed his clothes—in order to save the shabby dinner-jacket as much as possible, I guessed. The unobtrusive dark suit he wore was fairly respectable, but a close inspection would have revealed its age and condition. It was quite plain that my guest was hard put to it to keep up appearances, as they say.

My next discovery was that he was unfeignedly hungry. A plateful of thinly-cut *jambon de Parme*, liberally garnished with French mustard, began to disappear at an incredible rate. While he ate I asked an idle question about his work at the Imperial. He checked the upward movement of his hand, lowered a forkload of *jambon* on to his plate, and stared at me.

"Pf! That place," he said.

"Is it so bad as all that?" I asked.

He finished off the contents of his plate before replying.

"Monsieur, it is *épouvantable*." He shrugged his shoulders eloquently. "But what would you? One must live."

I ventured another question. He looked at me searchingly, as if to be satisfied that I was not merely out to gratify an idle curiosity.

"You would care to listen to my story, *hein*?"

I nodded. The Isola Bella's *filets de sole* were served in silence. I ordered the wine. Then I sat back and listened.

"I am Feodor Kranik. You have never heard the name? Of course not. Well, Monsieur, there was a

time when you might well have heard my name. The whole world might have known it, and acclaimed me. But it was not to be.

"Many years ago, Monsieur, I was a pupil of the great Lublin. I was more than that. In the end I became his favourite, his best pupil. The great Lublin said so himself, more than once. Sometimes he would say, 'Feodor, my son, you will be a great man. You will astonish the world.'"

The pianist of the Imperial orchestra paused to drink half a glass of Montrachet. He wiped his lips with a flick of his napkin and continued.

"Monsieur, I was young. I was ambitious. The world was waiting to be conquered. I was ready to conquer it. At the time of which I speak I had already worked hard for years. For seven years I had played incessantly, practising for five, six, and more hours a day. I had slaved for my music. It was all I lived for.

"All those early years the great Lublin had abused me. I was content. To be cursed by Lublin was to be praised. Those whom he despised he ignored. He praised no one, Monsieur. But after the seven years, he talked to me about myself. Then I knew that I was truly his most favoured pupil. He warned me of the difficulties, the dangers, the disappointments of this musical career I had lived for. He told me of the impresarios, the agents, money, the Press, social support—all the things essential to the success of a musician.

"There, at the threshold of my career, I was happy. Happy. Monsieur, I cannot tell you how happy I was. All the difficulties in the way it would merely be joy to

overcome. I have told you I was ambitious. Yes, more than that. I knew what I wanted."

He regarded his wine thoughtfully and raised the glass to his lips.

"I was wrong, Monsieur. I thought I did. But let me tell you the story.

"When I had been Lublin's pupil for five years, it chanced that he broke his rule. You see, Lublin until then had taught only men. He hated women.

"There were five of us at that time studying with Lublin. All men. There was never a woman in the place, save an old crone of a servant. In imitation of our master we, too, had unanimously declared a hatred of women. Judge of our astonishment, Monsieur, when Lublin suddenly announced one day that there would be another pupil, a woman. To say we were dismayed is not enough. At first we were too astounded to be angry. We thought Lublin was mad, certainly ill.

"The five of us held a council of war. Among ourselves we protested violently against the invader. Only one—a foolish German youth with tow-coloured hair; I forget his name—had a word to say in favour of the newcomer whom we had yet to see. I remember he made some coarse jest. I was destined to hate him after that. . . .

"Well, Monsieur, our protests were voiced only among ourselves. Our master had his way, as we all knew he would. It appeared that he had heard this young girl play. It was at some party. She had just begun to play when Lublin walked into the room. He listened to her for a few minutes, then walked quietly up to the piano and stood by her side. When she dropped her hands she



turned to find him there. Of course, she did not know who he was. Lublin did not often go to parties. She spoke to him.

" ' I wish I could really play,' she said.

" Just like that, Lublin told us afterwards. It was not what Lublin had expected. There was humility in her voice and a great longing.

" Lublin said, ' You could, Mademoiselle. You need a teacher, that is all.'

" She turned to him. Alas, she said, ' I am poor and it is impossible. Where is the teacher who would bother himself with me ?'

" Lublin banged himself on the chest.

" ' Here, Mademoiselle ! I will teach you !'

" And so Marguerite Descamps became one of us. Lublin arranged everything. Her parents were poor and no doubt glad to be relieved of the burden of supporting her. She came to Lublin's house and her life began afresh. I was the first of the others to set eyes on her.

" It was the first time she had seen Lublin in his own house. She must have found it strange. Lublin, you see, was peculiar. He was rather an apparition in his old yellow dressing-gown with his unkempt red beard and black skull cap.

" However, there she stood in the long practising room with its four pianos, looking up at Lublin, her lips parted tremulously, her eyes shining at all that lay before her. Poor Marguerite, if only she had known !

" At that time, Monsieur, I knew nothing of women. But when I saw Marguerite Descamps I thought I knew all I ever wanted to know. I fell madly in love with her. At first I did not dare to declare my passion, but

afterwards Marguerite told me I revealed it in a hundred different ways. My hand trembled, she said, when I passed a sheet of music to her, my voice was hoarse and unsteady. I could scarcely bring myself to look at her.

"Then one day that *sale* German tried to kiss her. She screamed. Luckily I was near at hand. I rushed into the room. What happened exactly I do not remember. It was Lublin who pulled me away from his throat. He was as strong as a horse, and he needed to be. I can see even now his dirty red beard wagging in my face as he stormed at me. But for Lublin I think I should have killed that German."

I turned, to find Micotti unobtrusively at my elbow. I waved him aside with a gesture. He bowed, smiling. He was content that I should leave the rest of that dinner to him.

Feodor Kranik's long, delicate fingers, trembling, I observed, and nicotine-stained, twined themselves round the stem of his glass. For a moment I feared he would not finish his story, but as I sat there in silence he suddenly took up the thread again.

"The day I left Lublin," he said, "we were married. The old man was furious. He cursed me, he cursed her, he cursed us both. He prophesied our destruction.

"Two artists!" he spat at us. "No, imbeciles! Mad, mad. Marriage is for the others, not for you!"

"We laughed at him. When we went he sent the old crone of a servant after us. She gave me a little canvas bag. It was full of gold coins. The old woman grinned toothlessly into the window of the carriage.

"The master says you will need it," she muttered.

"I was for throwing the money back at her but Marguerite held my arm.

" 'The master may be right,' she said, nodding her head. 'Better keep it.'

"Whatever Marguerite said, I agreed to—then. Afterwards I was to regret that I had given way. My courage in other things was henceforward destined to fail me. But Marguerite, tender, fragile little thing that she was, absorbed me utterly. I adored her, Monsieur. I wanted nothing better than to protect her, slave for her, always.

"That was how it was, Monsieur, in the beginning. I cannot speak much of the three years that followed. Lublin had not ~~exaggerated~~. Without money, without influence except for the few letters of introduction he had sent on after us, it was soul-destroying. The world does not want new musicians, Monsieur. But we were happy for a time. I was weary and discouraged at the rebuffs I received, but I did not lose heart. I tried to console Marguerite.

" 'After all, *petite*,' I said, 'we are young. We can live cheaply here in Paris. Presently the world will unlock its doors and we shall be rich and famous.'

"She dubiously shook her head.

" 'I ought to have stayed with Monsieur Lublin,' she would say. 'I shall never be able to play now.'

"I tried to soothe her, convince her I could earn riches and fame for the two of us. Then she would cry, moaning to herself.

" 'It is not the same,' she wept.

"And so we managed to scrape along, always living in the hope of the influential introduction which would get

me a hearing, living meanwhile by francs painfully acquired in teaching the stupid offspring of parents imbecile enough to waste their money. But in those days I at any rate was glad of their imbecility.

"Then our little daughter was born."

Feodor Kranik leaned across the table.

"Tell me, Monsieur, have you a daughter? No? Then you cannot know how I felt. It was wonderful."

He clasped his hands and for a minute was silent. It was impossible to read his thoughts. I waited patiently.

"After that things took a turn for the better. Little Diane had brought us good luck. I met a retired café proprietor who heard me playing in one of the establishments he had formerly owned. He took a fancy to me and became my patron. I was elated. My first concert was in sight at last.

"But as the day drew near, Marguerite became more and more despondent. Monsieur, a man in love is a fool. I did not see what was in front of my eyes. I was working hard, of course, practising, practising. Marguerite had the child, what more did she want?

"Then on the night of my concert she suddenly flew at my in a rage.

"'I hate you,' she cried, 'I hate you!'

"She burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping. I was terribly distressed, but what could I do? It was time for me to go. I went alone to my concert."

The eyes of Feodor Kranik glazed reminiscently. He nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, I played well that night. I remember I wished Lublin could have heard me. Ah, well!

"But Marguerite would hear none of it. Then,

at last, I faced the truth. She was jealous. Jealous of my work, of my career, of my future triumphs. Perhaps I was to blame, Monsieur. You see, I never thought of her as an artist. Only as a woman. And it was not enough.

"My work prospered. I made progress. Every step I advanced, we quarrelled afresh. But in a way life became more comfortable. We made money, not much, but enough to take a villa on the coast. Little Diane grew more beautiful every day. But for the child our life together would soon have become intolerable. So we went on. We made acquaintances and friends. I became known as Kranik the musician. Just that, Monsieur. I was working hard. I began to compose.

"Then I met a woman I will call Lawrence, Alicia Lawrence. I will not tell you her name, for you may know her "

The smiling Micotti took advantage of the pause that followed to serve *pigeon à la Polonaise*. Feodor Kranik watched his plate with unseeing eyes. I motioned silently to Micotti for more wine.

"Alicia Lawrence," he went on. "Yes, the name will serve. I met Mrs. Lawrence—one understood she was a widow—a few days after we moved into our villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. At that time she was living in a villa close by. It was the one next to ours, only a stone's throw away.

"Monsieur, never in my life had I met so beautiful a woman. She frightened me, Monsieur, she was so—how shall I put it?—so alluring, so irresistible. Like a rarely-perfumed flower that one needs must approach to scent its fragrance. She was superb.

"I had met other women since my marriage to Marguerite. Some had admired my playing, others—poor fools!—were more candid. To them I was a romantic figure, Hungarian, a musician, with my fashionable English school and cosmopolitan experiences as a background."

Feodor Kranik passed his hand over his brow in a swift gesture.

"The kind of attention that any rising artist receives at the hands of silly women. I tell you this, Monsieur, that you may realise I was not so ignorant then of women that I should blindly worship without reason. I was not faithful to Marguerite; I did not pretend to be. I despised those other women—but they gave me experience.

"Alicia could not be measured by their standards. She was"—he shrugged helplessly—"Monsieur, you know how it is, I cannot describe her to you. The moment she came into my life I loved her.

"The incredible part is that she loved me. It is true, Monsieur.

"I remember so well the day I met her. I was playing with little Diane in the sunshine when a shadow fell across the path. I turned round. It was Alicia. I must have stared at her like any uncouth peasant.

"She regarded me with a grave smile.

"'Is that your daughter, Monsieur? Yes, I can see she is. May I play with her sometimes, too? I am your nearest neighbour,' she added, nodding towards her own villa.

"I remembered hearing some talk about a rich American woman who had rented the Villa Tamarisk,

but for the moment I could not grasp the fact that this beautiful woman was actually talking to me, smiling at us both. Little Diane ran to her with hand outstretched. Alicia presently sat down beside us. We talked. It was as though we had known each other for the history of eternity.

"When I went into the house, Marguerite scolded me for keeping Diane out too late. I scarcely heard her.

"The next day I met Alicia again. I saw her every day after that. She begged me to play for her. I was enchanted. She came to our villa to hear me play. Marguerite was furious. Not because she saw—as she must have seen—my eyes following Alicia's every movement, but because it was my music Alicia wanted to hear. It was the same with everyone else from the little town nearby who came to visit us. The more I played for them, the more jealous Marguerite became. Sometimes she sat down at the piano and played herself."

Feodor Kranik smiled wryly.

"Poor Marguerite! It was useless. Our guests would shift uneasily in their chairs. It was me, Feodor Kranik, they wanted to hear.

"We had been in the villa several months—I do not know exactly how long, for I was absorbed in Alicia—when I became unpleasantly aware that our expenses were increasing rapidly. And I was earning no money. We were entertaining far beyond our means. I pointed this out to Marguerite.

"‘Then play,’ she retorted. ‘Let your wonderful playing make us rich, as you prophesied. What good does it do?’

"My pride was hurt. 'But my reputation!' I said. 'It is only a question of——'

"'Your reputation,' she sneered. 'It does not pay our bills.'

"It was true. I was earning nothing. I became suddenly depressed. Of course I turned to Alicia, confided my difficulties. To my surprise she laughed at me.

"'Feodor, my friend,' she said. 'But why didn't you tell me before?'

"I stared. Then it dawned on me. I protested vehemently. Such a thought had never crossed my mind. Intuition told her my indignation was sincere. She did not pursue the subject.

"I left the following day for Paris. Something had to be done. I went to my friend—as he was then—Auguste Michelet, the man who has made half the musicians in Europe. 'Tell me,' I begged him, 'what can I do?'

"He asked questions, shook his head.

"'I will be frank with you,' he said. 'You are one of those of whom one speaks as rising young musicians. You may succeed, who knows? You may fail. You stand at the threshold of a career. But you will find it difficult to cross the threshold. The other artists, the older ones, they are jealous. My God, they are jealous. To the public they say, "Thou shalt have no other gods but us." They will keep you outside if they can.'

"'It is to the public,' continued M. Michelet, 'that you must appeal. You must finance your own concerts, you must be independent. You must fight your way in, *mon vieux*.'



" 'All very well,' I replied. 'But I haven't a cent.'

" 'Find someone else who has,' was his parting advice."

Feodor Kranik idly watched Micotti deftly manipulate the spirit lamp under the glittering pan which was soon to yield piping-hot *crêpes Suzette*, done to a turn.

"An artist, Monsieur," he said, inclining his head towards the *maitre d'hôtel*, who flashed white teeth in a quick smile of appreciation.

"Well, Monsieur," my guest went on, "I returned to the villa in no very amiable frame of mind. I knew Michelet was right. I must soon make my bid for success. All depended on whether I could find the money.

"The weeks went by, and nothing happened. I began to lose heart. Marguerite was incessantly harping on the subject of money. Sometimes I felt as if I could strangle the words in her throat. But I knew there was something in what she said. Of course we quarrelled, continuously. I complained at her reckless extravagance. She abused me for my poverty. Only when poor little Diane fell ill was there any respite; the child tied us together. We both loved her. There we stood on common ground. Even Marguerite realised that. As we stood together anxiously watching the sleeping child, she said bitterly, 'The only link between us, Feodor.'

"With Alicia I was reticent. But it did not take her long to guess the truth. She came to me one day and begged me to let her come to my aid.

" 'Listen, Feodor,' she urged. 'I am rich. I have no use for all the money I possess. Let me give you what you need.'

"Monsieur, if ever a woman's eyes read love for a man, hers did for me. I knew it and I was trembling with a kind of ecstasy. You see, I had never really thought of Alicia as—a woman. To me she was a goddess. In a flash the future opened out gloriously before me, blinding my vision with its golden promise. What could one not do with money—and a woman like Alicia?

"The next instant I had seized her hand, was kneeling at her feet, brokenly murmuring my love for her. She bent down and kissed me.

"‘My Feodor,’ she said softly. ‘I will make you successful. Together you and I will face the whole world. Through me you shall triumph.’

"Her voice held an eager, passionate note. For the first time I faintly realised there was something possessive about her. I was indefinably troubled.

"‘To-morrow night we shall leave all this. Think, Feodor, you will be free! You will be well rid of that ill-tempered shrew. There is no link left between you and her, Feodor mine.’

"‘No link between us!’ What made her say that? A few hours before I had stood by Diane's bed—Diane, whom Marguerite had called the link between us. Thoughts of Diane flooded into my mind. She was ill, I could not leave her. I loved her, adored her. I could not leave her.

"Miserably I looked up at Alicia and shook my head.

"‘I cannot,’ I said. ‘There is the child.’

"Alicia drew me to her.

"‘My beloved,’ she whispered, ‘I will make up to you for that.’

"I disengaged myself from her arms. I wanted to think, and I could not. I was torn this way and that. But for Diane I would not have hesitated. But Diane . . .

" 'Listen, Feodor,' she said. 'You are an artist. You must think of your art. Without money—my money—you cannot succeed. You owe it to your art. Nothing else matters.'

"As though Diane did not matter . . .

" 'It is settled,' she said finally. 'We leave here to-morrow night for Paris. Then on to New York. We start life afresh.'

" 'But you do not understand,' I said.

"I tried to explain, she would not listen to me. I was in despair. The choice lay open to me, but how could I choose?

"At last she said:

" 'Feodor. With you I have no pride. But I cannot continue this—this debate. It is too much. You must decide. To-morrow you will let me know. I will arrange everything meanwhile. You will send me word. The car will be ready to leave at ten o'clock.'

"I thought desperately of Diane. If I had to leave her for ever I would at least spend the last precious hours with her. I thought quickly.

" 'At nine o'clock I will send word,' I said. 'But lest Marguerite suspects and makes a scene I will send word in this way.'

"Rapidly I untold my plan. I have told you, Monsieur, that the Villa Tamarisk was close at hand? From her windows she could plainly hear me when I played. So I arranged, if I were to accompany

her, to play the 'Song of Love.' If I could not, I would play the 'Pathétique.' So it was settled.

"The next day, Monsieur, was torture. Diane grew worse. All night I sat by her bed. Never can I forget that night. . . Then the grey daylight and Marguerite thrusting me from the room. I could not sleep. I tried to think. I had only a few hours left.

"Somehow the time passed. Still I did not know what to do. On the one hand, fame, applause, luxury, Alicia—all the things for which I longed intensely. I loved Alicia. I wanted her. Think, Monsieur, I had but to nod my head and she was mine—mine! The alternative was failure, poverty, unhappiness, but Diane. But Diane . . .

"That night, Monsieur, we had guests at the villa. I do not know if Marguerite invited them. I remember they came. They were politely concerned about Diane. I cursed them silently, my eyes on the clock. It was nearly time.

"I went upstairs to look for the last time at my daughter."

He broke off as coffee was served. But I noticed there were tears in his eyes.

"It was for the last time, Monsieur. I came slowly down the stairs to play my message to Alicia. I knew that little Diane would not wake. She was so used to the sound. It was but a minute to nine o'clock.

"I opened the door and went in. I was conscious of people sitting in attitudes of polite interest. I looked at the piano. There sat Marguerite. I turned desperately to the clock. It was just nine o'clock. As I moved forward, she began to play.

"Monsieur, this is the strange part of my story

"*She began to play the 'Pathétique.'*

"I was in agony. In that moment I hated her. I saw, as though the future were pictured before my eyes, the misery and the desolation of life with Marguerite. In horror I stared at her fingers moving over the keys. In a moment it would be too late.

"Suddenly I sprang forward.

"*'Marguerite!'* I cried. *'The child—Diane. She is crying for you.'*

"It was base, but it had to be done. With a little cry Marguerite jumped up and ran to the door. As it opened—may God forgive me, Monsieur, if I do not speak the truth—I heard a child's voice—crying.

"I sat down at the piano. My fingers grouped themselves and hung for a second over the keys. That is all I remember."

Feodor Kranik buried his face in his hands.

I looked at him and wondered whether Alicia had died or abandoned him, or whether caprice had led him to abandon her. These rich women and these artists!

"Well," I said, "the *'Song of Love'* didn't work?"

He raised his head and turned sombre eyes on me. Then he slowly shook his head.

"I played the *'Pathétique,'*" he said.

### *Notes on "The Melody of Love"*

"The Melody of Love" is a familiar type of magazine story.

This is how it occurred to me to write it: Playing the piano one evening, I found myself thinking that a message could easily be conveyed to a listener outside if a sort of musical code had been prearranged. That started my train of thought. I began

to visualise a story, a certain melody being played to warn someone outside. That idea proved sterile. Still meditating over it, I conjured up a musician conveying a romantic message, or a decision, by playing one of two prearranged tunes at a given time. Romantic—that was better. Tune A if he would join his beloved; tune B if he could, or would not. Then—it suddenly flashed across my mind—what would happen if someone else happened to be playing the piano *at the appointed time and by chance played tune B—the wrong tune?*

There was my story. I began to hatch it out. (It later underwent substantial alteration, as we shall see.) A surprise-ending story seemed the most promising frame for it. It also struck me as being suited to the "story within a story" pattern. My mind began to fill in the gaps.

A Hungarian musician, ageing, a failure, reduced to playing in a music-hall orchestra, etc., tells his story. Young, full of brilliant promise, as he was years ago, he marries—another artist. Both artists, they quarrel. Soon their child is the only link between them. Anton (Kranik) meets a rich, attractive woman with whom he falls violently in love. She returns his passion. At this time money is the only thing he really needs to establish his reputation. She begs him to let her assist his art. He will not. Then she begs him to leave his wife and child and start life afresh with her. Anton is sorely tempted. She insists on his decision. He says he will make up his mind that evening. Her villa—the scene is in the South of France—is close by the Kraniks' and so near that she can readily hear the piano being played. He arranges to play at 9 o'clock the "Song of Love" if he will sail with her at midnight; the "Pathétique" if he stays behind. That night there are guests at their villa. Anton has quarrelled with his wife once again and waits for 9 o'clock. It chanced that his wife sits down to play for a few minutes before and, as fate will have it, begins to play the "Pathétique." Anton is in despair. Suddenly he rises, cries out that the child is crying upstairs. His wife drops her hands, rushes upstairs; Anton, ostensibly to soothe the nerves of his guests, sits down at the piano, and plays. . . . \*

\* Then I hit on the ending—a twist in the O. Henry manner. I

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\* This was in fact the synopsis I drafted before writing the story. I changed the name "Anton" to "Feodor."

actually wrote the last few lines before I began the story. Here they are :

I looked at him and wondered whether the woman had died or abandoned him, or whether caprice had led him to abandon her.

" Well," I said, " the ' Song of Love ' didn't work ? "

He turned his sombre eyes on me, and slowly nodded his head.

" I played the ' Pathétique,' " he said.

The story itself was easily written. The music-hall had to be introduced ; I got it in the first line. It was also necessary to portray the narrator, the man to whom Anton tells his story. I chose the first-person method (which I usually avoid) because I wanted a realistic atmosphere—otherwise the story itself might seem too fantastic. For the same reason Anton was shabby—nothing more realistic than shabbiness !

The first problem to be solved was the narrator's meeting with Anton, but the dropped spectacles, if a hackneyed device, seemed natural enough. I had deliberately made the narrator a lonely man to justify his impulsive invitation to supper. Good food and wine were necessary to loosen Anton's tongue (a sandwich and a glass of beer would never have extracted the story !). So I had to choose a good restaurant. In writing the story, for convenience I used the name of the Isola Bella, intending to substitute a fictitious name in revision. As it happened I asked Micotti's advice about the food (he approved of the dishes I had chosen), and when I told him I had put him and his restaurant into the story, he seemed to approve of that too. So I let the names stand. This practice, however, is not recommended.

The food and wine, although irrelevant to the actual story, were important details. In a story of this type they provide convenient breathing-spaces. In unfolding the story I tried to avoid monotony by breaking it up at certain points. By this means I also hoped to maintain suspense-interest.

I was doubtful about Lublin, but obviously he had to be introduced into Anton's story. I rather liked the creation of this character, with his red beard and old dressing-gown and black skull cap, and his dislike of women. The effect I aimed at was, of course, musical genius. Lublin was a minor character (I resisted the temptation to make more of him) and he had to be pictured in a few lines—hence his picturesque accoutrements.

Marguerite, young and fragile, later to become jealous of Anton's success, was easily drawn. The other woman—Alicia—was more difficult, but, it seemed to me, less important to the story. She dazzled Anton and he could not picture her clearly, anyway.

Anton's interview with Michelet, who confirmed the importance of money to his career, was not planned beforehand, but in writing the story some such prop seemed advisable. Anton's love for his child was important to the story—the twist at the end depends directly on this—and I stressed this accordingly. At the same time, in order to account for Anton's subsequent downfall, it was necessary that Diane should die. This is not stated directly in the story, but the following lines make it clear, I think :

" I went upstairs to look for the last time at my daughter."

He broke off as coffee was served. But I noticed there were tears in his eyes.

" It was for the last time, Monsieur——" etc.

If he had said, directly, " She died that night " the ending would have been weakened. To maintain the suspense, it was essential to have Anton torn one way by his love for Diane, and the other by his career and infatuation for the other woman. Kill off Diane, and the situation collapses. Yet, when the reader comes to the end, he will naturally ask himself, " But what happened to Diane ? " As anything following the climax would ruin its effect, it was essential to convey this beforehand to the reader. It was a nice problem. As I saw it, it was best solved in this way ; if the reader does not recall those few lines, a second glance through the story would (so I hoped) satisfy him.

Marguerite was originally a violinist, but I turned her into a pianist in order that she should be the one to begin playing the " Pathétique " at nine o'clock. This was obviously more dramatic and it fitted in neatly enough.

Approaching the climax, I cut out every word I could. By condensing the narrative I ran the risk of not being sufficiently explicit, but this type of story seems to me to narrow to a point at the end, and a few words too many would spoil the effect. I am not at all sure, however, that the ending is right.

One obvious disadvantage of the ending, and, for that matter,



of the whole story (from the magazine point of view), is its unhappy atmosphere. I am always preaching the advantages of happy-ending stories, but in this instance no other development seemed possible, and I decided to let it go. Another drawback is the story's necessarily old-fashioned atmosphere. No one could call it a modern story, and magazine editors prefer modern stories. Finally, it is a story about artists—and there is a glut of "artists" in fiction. Editors are sick of stories about writers and poets and painters and musicians. I therefore consider I was lucky to sell this story. It has a certain technical interest, but I would not recommend anyone to choose a similar theme.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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